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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 8 December 2021

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

Portfolio Question Time

Covid-19 Recovery and Parliamentary Business

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): I remind members of the Covid-related measures that are in place. Face coverings must be worn when moving around the chamber and across the Holyrood campus.

The first item of business is portfolio questions. The first portfolio is Covid-19 recovery and parliamentary business. If a member wishes to ask a supplementary question, they should press their request-to-speak button or indicate their request in the chat function by entering the letter R during the relevant question.

Local Council Elections (Spending)

1. **Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what consideration was given to increasing the maximum spend on both long and short campaigns for the forthcoming Scottish local council elections in May 2022. (S6O-00490)

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (George Adam): Expenses limits for Scottish local government elections were updated as part of the recent set of instruments that was laid before Parliament ahead of the May 2022 local council elections. Specifically, the Representation of the People (Variation of Limits of Candidates' Local Government Election Expenses) (Scotland) Order 2021 increased the maximum expenditure limit to £806, together with an additional 7p for every entry in the register of electors.

The power of the Scottish ministers to vary the limits on candidates' expenditure in local government election campaigns is restricted to changes that are linked to inflation or made on the Electoral Commission's recommendation. The increase that was made by the recent order was in line with inflation and the Electoral Commission made no further recommendation for change.

Paul McLennan: This matter is being discussed in the Scottish National Party and other political parties, particularly in relation to campaigning during Covid. Will the minister outline plans for reviewing campaign expenditure in future Scottish Parliament and local council elections?

George Adam: The Government reviews campaign expenditure limits ahead of each set of parliamentary and local government elections. As noted, the Scottish ministers' power to amend spending limits for local government elections is limited, unless it is in response to a recommendation by the Electoral Commission. I am confident that the commission will consider any lessons learned from the holding of the 2022 elections. We will continue to work productively with it ahead of any future changes.

Omicron Variant (Covid-19 Recovery Strategy)

2. **Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the potential impact of the omicron variant on the implementation of its Covid-19 recovery strategy. (S6O-00491)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney): Public Health Scotland is working rigorously to assess how many cases of omicron there are likely to be in Scotland. Together with local test and protect teams, it will work to identify how the virus might have been transmitted and to break further chains of transmission. Our response to the new variant will develop as we learn more about the risk that it poses and as we find out more about its spread within Scotland. We will continue to closely monitor the situation and be guided by the latest science and clinical advice.

We will continue to do all that we can to ensure that people in Scotland are offered the greatest possible protection through vaccination, as quickly as we can. That, in turn, will help our continuing progress on recovery. Indeed, Scotland already has the highest vaccination rate of all the United Kingdom nations for the first, second and third doses.

Paul O'Kane: The arrival of omicron in Scotland is a stark reminder, if we needed it, that the virus has not gone away. Care workers I speak to, who have gone above and beyond in the past 20 months, are once again rightly concerned about how we will support the most vulnerable people in our society.

The recovery plan speaks about the importance of fair work principles in social care, so does the cabinet secretary agree that a wage of at least £15 an hour would fairly recognise the huge contribution of care workers? Will he call on his colleague the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy to deliver that in tomorrow's budget in order to match the aspirations of his recovery plan and give care workers the pay rise that they deserve?

John Swinney: I absolutely acknowledge the significance of the work of care sector employees.

They have done a magnificent job in trying circumstances. I thank them and admire them for their contribution.

As Mr O'Kane will know, the Government has already taken steps to support and increase the pay that is available for social care staff. The finance secretary will make announcements and set out her position to Parliament tomorrow. Mr O'Kane will realise that it is not for me to make statements and comments about those issues today. However, it must be acknowledged that the Government has already taken substantial steps to enhance the remuneration of social care workers and support the efforts to improve recruitment in the sector, which are beginning to show some signs of success.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):

If we are going to minimise the impact of the omicron variant, we need to ensure that people have access to booster vaccines. I have a constituent who had the first and second vaccine in Scotland but has had to move to the south of England for family reasons. She has been told that the only way for her to get her booster is to return to Scotland. Surely that is something that can be sorted out between the national health service in Scotland and the NHS in other parts of the United Kingdom. Can the cabinet secretary look into it?

John Swinney: If Mr Fraser would care to send me the details, I will look into it. I can see no good reason why that should be the case. Certainly, in light of the information that Mr Fraser has given me about the case, it makes no sense for that individual to be requested to come back to Scotland to receive the booster vaccination. If Mr Fraser writes to me with those details, I will attend to that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before calling question 3, I note that the member was late to the chamber and I would be minded not to call him. In the interests of any members who may wish to ask a supplementary, I will do so, but I would wish for him to provide an apology and an explanation before he asks his question.

Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP): My sincere apologies, Presiding Officer. I simply lost track of time. I apologise profusely to members in the chamber.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you. Please pose your question.

Covid-19 Recovery (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire)

3. **Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how its co-ordination of Covid-19 policies can ensure people living in Perthshire South and

Kinross-shire are supported through the recovery from the pandemic. (S6O-00492)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):

Despite progress, we know that the impacts of Covid continue to be felt acutely by many individuals, businesses and other organisations across Scotland. We are working closely with local government to implement the shared vision and outcomes of the Covid recovery strategy and we will continue to work with local authorities, including Perth and Kinross Council, to shape the recovery activity that will support the rebuilding of local public services, create and sustain good, green jobs and fair work, drive financial security for low-income households and improve the wellbeing of children and young people.

Jim Fairlie: Given the important role that vaccination will play in Covid recovery, efficient roll-out of the vaccine will be key. Unfortunately, recent changes to the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation guidance meant that members of the public turned up at vaccination centres before they could legally receive their booster, and some staff and volunteers experienced abuse in our local centre. What cross-Government co-ordination can be put in place to ensure that future changes to the JCVI guidance do not result in a repeat of that unfortunate situation?

John Swinney: Obviously, the JCVI advice required us to move at pace to ensure that individuals could have access to the booster vaccination. In the context of the overwhelming scale and success of the vaccination programme, I am aware of a small number of cases where individuals were inconvenienced because of the change in approach. The necessary advice has been issued to health boards and communicated widely in the healthcare system, and the guidance has been updated on the NHS inform website. We apologise to anyone who was unable to get their booster vaccination, but I am satisfied that the measures are now in place to ensure that that approach is in operational practice at a local level and that all the clinical and legal requirements have been met.

Covid-19 Vaccination Certification Scheme

4. **Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government when ministers last met with key stakeholders, including business owners, to discuss the Covid-19 vaccine certification scheme. (S6O-00493)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):

Our review process over the past few weeks has included ministerial engagement with a wide range of business sectors, including hospitality, tourism,

culture and events, which have been most impacted by Covid. The new omicron variant has refocused our efforts and those discussions and, again, stressed the importance of our protection measures, such as the Covid status certification scheme. Last week, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Economy met the Confederation of British Industry, the Federation of Small Businesses, the Institute of Directors, Scottish Chambers of Commerce, the Scottish Council for Development and Industry and Scottish Financial Enterprise.

Pauline McNeill: I welcome that high level of engagement with the sector. The hospitality sector welcomes the introduction of testing to the certification scheme, but it notes that the scheme will still have an on-going impact. We have seen that from the experience in Wales, where there is a 20 per cent reduction in all trade levels in the sector. The Scottish Beer and Pub Association says that there has been a drop of 40 per cent in trade since the introduction of the Covid passport scheme—not just from normal times. What further steps can be taken to provide more frequent and widespread communication to the public that they can test before they go out to nightclubs and other hospitality sector venues, to deliver more spontaneous visits where it is safe to do so?

John Swinney: Pauline McNeill will be familiar with the delicate balance that the Government is trying to strike in the matter. We want business sectors to be able to operate as normally as possible, but we face significant threats, and a renewed threat from the omicron variant into the bargain. The message that the Government has been setting out over the past 10 days about increasing the volume of individual testing before socialising or going to a retail environment is important in encouraging individuals to take more responsibility in ensuring that they are safe to go out and circulate.

As I indicated in a radio interview earlier this week, I am now testing myself daily when I am likely to be in contact with members of the public. That is a personal decision to protect my family and ensure that I am able to safely exercise the functions of my office in relation to others. I encourage members of the public to do likewise.

It is essential that we ensure that lateral flow device testing kits are available. They are freely available through the NHS inform website and at numerous pharmacies. In partnership with local authorities, we are trying to extend the physical availability of the kits in communities.

Covid-19 Recovery (Island Communities)

5. Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how its policies across Government will support island

communities to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic. (S6O-00494)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney): We know that the impacts of Covid-19 continue to be felt acutely by many individuals, businesses and other organisations across our island communities.

The £30 million islands programme will ensure delivery of the national islands plan, and is informed by our learning on how island communities have responded and adapted to Covid-19. We continue to work closely across Government and with our island partners to implement the shared vision and outcomes of the Covid recovery strategy, which sets out the actions that we will take to address systemic inequalities made worse by Covid-19, make progress towards a wellbeing economy and accelerate inclusive, person-centred public services.

Dr Allan: What can be done to build resilience to ensure that the supply chain issues that badly affected some island communities at various points throughout the pandemic are not repeated in the future?

John Swinney: I need share no information on the matter with Dr Allan, given his assiduous representation of his constituency, but the island communities are heavily dependent on the ferry connections that provide essential services in bulk to the islands. Over the course of the pandemic, there have been instances in which staff have had to isolate for Covid purposes, which has disrupted the availability of the ferry network.

I assure Dr Allan that a very pragmatic approach is taken to ensure that island communities are properly and fully serviced by ferry vessels. I noticed that, as a consequence of today's disruption due to weather issues, CalMac Ferries has put in place additional sailings to, I think, Castlebay. That is an indication that, where possible, we will use flexibility and pragmatism to ensure that island communities are properly serviced at a time when there can be unavoidable disruption due to self-isolation and other impacts of the Covid pandemic.

Covid-19 Recovery (Dumfries and Galloway and the Scottish Borders)

6. Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how its policies and actions across Government will support Dumfries and Galloway and the Scottish Borders to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic. (S6O-00495)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney): The Covid recovery strategy sets out how we will

rebuild by working collaboratively across Government and with our partners in local government, business and the third sector.

Recovery priorities will vary by location and local needs; therefore, we will continue to work in partnership to deliver the joint leadership that is necessary for that effort. Both Scottish Borders and Dumfries and Galloway will benefit from the Scottish Government's £85 million contribution to the Borderlands inclusive growth deal, which will support a range of projects and programmes designed to drive sustainable economic growth across the region.

We have also provided up to £125,000 to support the South of Scotland Regional Economic Partnership to develop the area's first regional economic strategy, thereby establishing a framework and delivery plan for national agencies and regional partners to work together to achieve a sustained and inclusive recovery from the effects of Covid-19.

Emma Harper: Across D and G and the Scottish Borders, when Covid-19 protective measures were put in place, many businesses welcomed the Covid-19 business support funding that was made available to keep them afloat. Following the emergence of the omicron variant, what engagement has the Scottish Government had with the United Kingdom Government about whether the Treasury will make finances available to the Scottish Government, should public health protections be required again?

John Swinney: The First Minister, along with the First Minister of Wales, wrote to the Prime Minister last week to set out a number of practical issues that we believe need to be addressed in relation to the possible implications of the omicron variant. One of those issues is the possibility of business operations being interrupted due to additional restrictions that we might have to bring in. We make the point in the letter about the importance of having a flexible approach across the United Kingdom to ensure that different Administrations—which might be affected at different times, although the scale and time of any impact could be the same across the whole of the United Kingdom—have financial support made available to them.

We welcome the fact that there was support from Her Majesty's Treasury in earlier stages of the pandemic. As we have reflected in this question time session, the threat has not gone away. It might—it is likely to—intensify as a consequence of omicron, so we need to have financial support. We will continue to discuss the matter with the United Kingdom Government.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Given the vital role that public transport will

play in post-pandemic recovery in helping not only young people but others to find and secure employment, and to return to social activities, can the Scottish Government give an assurance that public bus and rail services in my constituency will return to pre-Covid levels, and that the recovery of rural areas will not be put at risk through damaging cuts?

John Swinney: I would certainly want that to be the case. I acknowledge the importance of public transport in ensuring that connectivity is available for all citizens. Its importance is particularly apparent in an area such as Dumfries and Galloway and, for the benefit of completeness in relation to the question, the Scottish Borders.

The Government has, of course, put in place significant levels of financial support to sustain the operations of transport providers during the pandemic. Of necessity—because of restrictions—public transport has carried many fewer passengers than would have been the case otherwise. However, we want to see a vibrant public sector network to ensure that the needs of all citizens, whether they are accessing college, training places or employment, or making connections across the community, are able to be satisfied. I give Mr Carson the assurance that the Government is working to that objective, although a lot of dialogue is to be had about specific services and provision.

Covid-19 Recovery (Low-income Families)

7. Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how its policies across Government will support families on low incomes to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic. (S6O-00496)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney): Increasing financial security for low-income households is one of the central aims of our Covid recovery strategy and we are focused on supporting those most affected during the pandemic.

The Scottish Government is taking a range of actions that will transform the lives of many families across Scotland. From April 2022, we are doubling the Scottish child payment to £20 a week, which could lift a further 20,000 children out of poverty. The policy is the most ambitious child poverty reduction measure in the United Kingdom and demonstrates our commitment to supporting low-income families as we recover from the pandemic.

We are also progressing work to further expand funded early learning and childcare for one and two-year-olds, starting with those from low-income households. Alongside that, we are expanding our

free school breakfast and lunch provision, starting with those who need it most.

Jackie Dunbar: I welcome the Scottish Government's announcement that the game-changing Scottish child payment will be doubled to £20 a week in the coming budget. What impact will the policy have on tackling child poverty as we recover from the pandemic?

John Swinney: The analysis that has been undertaken so far indicates that increasing the amount of the Scottish child payment to £20 a week could lift 40,000 children out of poverty, reducing overall child poverty by an estimated four percentage points in 2023-24. That is based on initial analysis; we hope to publish further analysis in early 2022. It will give the families of more than 106,000 children under the age of six an immediate cash boost when it is introduced in April 2022.

We will, of course, look to take other steps to support the financial wellbeing of low-income families and to ensure that the interventions that we make—for example, for the creation of employment or the expansion of wraparound childcare—are also targeted at supporting those families. We will look to make sure that we use a combination of different interventions, including the child payment and employment support, to enable us to achieve the outcome of reducing child poverty and improving the financial security of low-income households.

Covid-19 Recovery (North-east Scotland)

8. Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how its policies across Government will support the north-east's recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. (S6O-00497)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney): We are actively supporting economic recovery in the north-east. We have provided close to £100 million to support businesses and additional funding of almost £150 million to councils to help achieve that objective. We are also investing £157 million in the Aberdeen city region deal and the Moray growth deal, and over £14 million to develop the skills that are needed to support regional economic recovery.

Alongside that, we have recently confirmed our intention to commit £500 million of capital, over the next 10 years, to support the just transition of the north-east region and Moray to support energy transition, create jobs and maximise the region's future economic potential.

Karen Adam: I welcome the investment in the north-east. As that region continues to recover from storm Arwen—and now storm Barra, as

well—many people are not able to schedule or attend for their Covid vaccination booster. With the omicron variant spreading throughout Scotland, what advice can the Deputy First Minister give to my constituents who have delayed getting booster jags because of the storm disruption?

John Swinney: A number of vaccination clinics in the north-east of Scotland took a decision to close early on Friday, 26 November, for safety reasons, due to concern about the severe weather from storm Arwen. Some clinics remained closed over that weekend up to Monday 29 November. We understand that all vaccination clinics that were affected by storm Arwen have now reopened and are operational.

Where vaccination appointments were impacted, people were immediately redirected to unaffected vaccination centres, so that they would not have to wait to book their appointments on another day. Health boards have implemented processes to ensure that appointments that were missed due to the storm were rescheduled, including by contacting those for whom they hold details and issuing public communications.

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): Something that can make a huge impact on the north-east's recovery is free port status for Aberdeen and Peterhead. Will the cabinet secretary stop playing petty politics with thousands of jobs and engage with the United Kingdom Government's free port programme?

John Swinney: We have fully engaged with the United Kingdom Government's free port agenda. We want to make sure that it is compatible with the democratic decisions of the Scottish Parliament. I think that this Parliament, by an overwhelming majority, wants the approach to the free port concept in Scotland to have at its heart the concept of fair work—and by "fair work", I mean the payment of the real living wage.

If Mr Lumsden happened to see the exchange on Monday between the Secretary of State for Scotland, Mr Alister Jack, and the member of Parliament for Edinburgh North and Leith, Deirdre Brock, he would have seen Mr Jack confirm that the issue that is at stake—which the secretary of state has decided to put a flag in the ground for and make the absolute obstacle to agreeing the model that we have put forward—is payment of the real living wage.

There we have it. The Conservatives want to support a low-wage economy.

Douglas Lumsden: That is rubbish.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): Nonsense.

John Swinney: The bully boys of the Conservative benches are trying to shout me

down for simply explaining to them what their Secretary of State for Scotland said to a House of Commons committee, which is chaired by my distinguished colleague, the member for Perth and North Perthshire, Pete Wishart—an excellent House of Commons committee chair, if ever there was one—and to my colleague Deirdre Brock, who managed to extract from the secretary of state that the Tories are only interested in perpetuating low pay.

This Government and, I think, members of other parties in the chamber are interested in decent pay and fair work, and the sooner the Conservatives join the journey, the better for Scotland.

Net Zero, Energy and Transport

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next portfolio is net zero, energy and transport. If members wish to request a supplementary question, they should press their request-to-speak button, or indicate so in the chat function by entering the letter R, during the relevant question.

“A Vision for Scotland’s Railways”

1. **Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the report, “A Vision for Scotland’s Railways”, produced for Scotland’s rail unions. (S6O-00498)

The Minister for Transport (Graeme Dey): We welcome the fact that the unions are sharing their ideas and views, and I look forward to discussing those with the unions at our next meeting, when arranged. However, the member should be assured that we are pressing ahead to put in place arrangements to mobilise a wholly owned company structure of the Scottish Government for the provision of ScotRail services following the expiration of the current franchise.

The new ScotRail operator, ScotRail Trains Ltd, and its management and staff will, I am sure, share with all members and the general public a desire for ScotRail to be a world-leading railway service that offers value to passengers and the wider economy while being financially and environmentally sustainable.

Graham Simpson: I thank the minister for that answer—of course, he did not actually answer the question, which was asking for his response to the report. I am not sure whether he has read it, but it was produced for Scotland’s four rail unions and is at least a vision for the future. We have heard nothing like that from the minister so far.

ScotRail is to be nationalised in March. We do not know anything about the governance, staffing, timetables, tickets and rolling stock. We do not

know whether there will be redundancies. However, we know that there will be a series of big-bucks appointments, as that is already in process. Will the minister agree to cross-party talks on nationalisation? Will he make a statement on where we are with that, given that we are only a few months away? Will he also involve the unions in the process?

Graeme Dey: What we will not do is what the Tory Government is doing south of the border in slashing billions of pounds from rail services.

The member asked various questions. I am in the process of writing to the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee—the convener of which is the member’s colleague—to outline some of the information that he is looking for. That will be in the public domain within a matter of days.

I am more than happy to provide a statement to the Parliament, subject to the agreement of the Parliamentary Bureau, early in the new year.

I have read the report. I was given a copy ahead of its publication. There are a number of aspects in it on which I think we will all be in agreement. There are some good suggestions in there. I am sure that Mr Simpson has many good suggestions to make, too, and I am more than happy to meet him to hear those.

Public Transport and Connectivity (Falkirk East)

2. **Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government when it last met Falkirk Council to discuss public transport and connectivity within the rural areas of the Falkirk East constituency, and what was discussed. (S6O-00499)

The Minister for Transport (Graeme Dey): Transport Scotland officials met Falkirk Council representatives on 15 November as part of the Forth valley regional transport working group, which was established to facilitate collaborative working and engagement for the second strategic transport projects review. Attendees discussed the emerging draft recommendations, which follow extensive engagement during the course of the review on the transport problems and opportunities in the region.

Michelle Thomson: Many people in the outlying areas of my constituency of Falkirk East feel that they have been left adrift by private companies that are driven by profit. Although I understand that the number of passengers is still below pre-Covid levels, that does not mean that communities should be cut off for the want of regular and reliable public transport. With that in mind, will the minister outline what support and encouragement the Scottish Government is providing to local authorities such as Falkirk

Council to provide public transport and connectivity to communities, particularly at this stage in the pandemic? What further steps is the Government taking to ensure that public transport is run for the benefit of our communities and citizens and not just shareholders?

Graeme Dey: During the pandemic, we have maintained concessionary travel reimbursement and bus operator grant payments at pre-Covid levels, and we have made available up to £210 million in additional funding up to the end of this financial year. Bus operators that receive that additional funding are not allowed to make a profit and are required to adapt services to current demand, to have regard to maintaining connectivity and to keep services under review, in consultation with local transport authorities and health boards.

Covid support funding is in addition to the funding that is provided to local authorities through the block grant for supporting socially necessary services. That sum of money totalled £57 million in 2019-20.

The Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 provides local transport authorities with a range of enhanced options to improve bus services in their area. We are analysing responses to the consultation on the secondary legislation that is required to implement that system.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): Rural villages across Falkirk would benefit from safer streets and improved connectivity. Will the minister agree to an urgent review of Scottish Government policy and guidance regarding 20mph zones in rural villages, especially in Reddingmuirhead and Airth, where residents have long campaigned for such zones, in order to support Falkirk Council in meeting community demands?

Graeme Dey: We covered that issue extensively during the member's recent members' business debate. As he well knows, we have plans to introduce a review of the presumptions in relation to 20mph zones across the whole of Scotland, not just in his region.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 3 is from Joe FitzPatrick, who joins us remotely.

Free Bicycles Pilot Projects

3. Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee City West) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its pilots to provide free bicycles for school-age children. (S6O-00500)

The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights (Patrick Harvie): On 17 August, we announced the first six pilot projects that were selected to offer free bicycles to school-age children who cannot afford

one. The pilots are under way across the country. Since then, a further four pilots have been launched, including a pilot on Shetland and a pilot specialising in the provision of non-standard bikes, which are modified to fit the needs of an individual rider. To date, 242 bikes have been issued, and the pilots have ambitious plans to deliver considerably more this month and beyond.

Joe FitzPatrick: The minister is aware that, in my constituency, the Dundee cycle hub, which is operated by the Dundee and Angus Cycle Hub, is participating in one of the pilot projects by providing free bikes to school-age children in Dundee. Can he provide an indication of the number of bikes that have been, and are expected to be, provided to children in Dundee during the pilot?

Patrick Harvie: Yes. The Angus cycle hub pilot is based on a central bike distribution centre for the Angus and Dundee areas, with regional support provided by dedicated development workers and bike mechanics. The pilot is providing specialist support for young people in marginalised families in Angus and Dundee in order that they can engage with cycling, active travel and health and wellbeing opportunities.

To date, 105 bikes have been delivered, 127 additional applications for bikes have been received and 502 bikes have been readied to go by the Angus cycle hub.

Fuel Poverty (Motherwell and Wishaw)

4. Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what support is available to people in the Motherwell and Wishaw constituency who are in fuel poverty. (S6O-00501)

The Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport (Michael Matheson): The Scottish Government's local area-based scheme and national warmer homes Scotland scheme are available in all areas of Scotland. They are designed to make homes warmer and cheaper to heat for those living in or at risk of fuel poverty.

Since 2013, the Scottish Government has allocated more than £21 million in funding for North Lanarkshire Council as part of our area-based scheme. Our winter support fund includes £10 million for a fuel insecurity fund, which will ensure that direct financial support is available to those at risk of self-disconnecting or self-rationing energy use as a result of increased energy prices this winter.

Clare Adamson: The United Kingdom energy market is, quite frankly, broken. We have some of the highest energy prices in Europe, and we have had some of the highest hikes in recent months. That broken market is evidenced by the fact that

so many providers are going into administration, which is causing more stress for my constituents who are already worried about fuel poverty.

What protections are in place for constituents whose energy provider is entering administration?

Michael Matheson: The member makes a good point about the existing structural problems with the United Kingdom energy market, which is largely broken down into two types of companies—those that have hedged on energy markets and those that have not. As a result of significant spikes in energy wholesale prices, a significant number of unhedged companies find themselves in serious financial difficulty, leading to their withdrawal from the market, which leaves customers in difficult positions.

The member is aware that the present structure of the regulation of the energy market is the responsibility of the UK Government. As it stands, the Office of Gas and Electricity Market's supplier of last resort process covers customers whose suppliers are no longer able to provide them with the service. The process was designed to minimise disruption in such an event, and the customer should wait to be contacted by the new supplier that Ofgem has allocated to them. Any of the member's constituents who experience difficulties with a new supplier should contact Advice Direct Scotland directly, which will be able to provide them with advice and support on the issue.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Liam Kerr to ask a supplementary question. He will be aware that the question in the *Business Bulletin* relates to the people of Motherwell and Wishaw.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): My question relates to fuel poverty, too. In March, the UK Government awarded Aberdeen City Council £2.2 million to retrofit homes to save households around £450 a year and keep them out of fuel poverty. Aberdeen has a great deal of older, granite housing stock, so decarbonisation will present huge costs. What estimates has the Scottish Government made of the cost of retrofitting those granite houses, and what financial help will be given to Aberdeen City Council to tackle that older, granite housing stock?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before I ask the cabinet secretary to respond, I stress that the question in the *Business Bulletin* asks about

“what support is available to people in the Motherwell and Wishaw constituency who are in fuel poverty.”

That is quite clear. However, I presume that the cabinet secretary is able to respond to Mr Kerr's supplementary question.

Michael Matheson: I suspect that granite properties in the Motherwell and Wishaw

constituency will face similar difficulties to those in areas such as North East Scotland in relation to tackling insulation issues.

I welcome the small amount of investment that the UK Government has made to assist with some of that work. The member will be mindful that we have invested some £430 million over the course of the period since 2013 in that area alone. We have increased our funding again this year in order to support the area-based scheme, so that it can assist local authorities in areas such as Motherwell and Wishaw and in areas such as North East Scotland.

Trunk Road Network (Safety)

5. Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to improve road safety on the trunk road network. (S6O-00502)

The Minister for Transport (Graeme Dey): Scotland has some of the safest roads in the world. Despite that success, each collision and injury is traumatic for everyone who is involved, and more remains to be done to reduce collisions. We have achieved substantial reductions in accidents and casualties through targeted programmes of investment on trunk roads and joint working with road safety partners.

Members might wish to know that across 42 assessed countries in Europe and beyond, Scotland currently has the eighth-lowest fatality level. However, we are not complacent in any way and continue to look at where we can make further improvements.

Finlay Carson: The minister is aware that a trial on the A9 raised speed limits from 40mph to 50mph for heavy goods vehicles over 7 and a half tonnes, in line with other trials in the rest of the United Kingdom that, critically, had resulted in a steady reduction in the number of collisions and casualties, as it addressed one of the main driver frustrations—slow-moving lorries.

In the past five years, 170 accidents occurred on the A75, nine of which were fatal. As the main route to the ferry ports at Cairnryan, the A75 has a disproportionately high number of HGVs on the road compared with other trunk roads. Will the Scottish Government commit to reviewing HGV speed limits along the A75 with appropriate speed cameras to improve safety and reduce fatalities as a matter of urgency?

Graeme Dey: The Department for Transport published its three-year evaluation of the effects of increasing speed limits in England and Wales, which showed no statistically significant changes in the number of accidents involving at least one HGV on all single and dual-carriageway roads.

That said, we are using the evaluation from that alongside the A9 project as part of the national speed management review that was set out in the delivery plan for the recently published "Scotland's Road Safety Framework to 2030". That workstream has commenced.

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): I want to ask specifically about average speed cameras and how they can improve safety. Analysis has been done of the A9 and A90 since the introduction of average speed cameras on those roads, so could the same mechanisms be applied on the A96?

Graeme Dey: I would be happy to write to the member with the analysis that she is looking for. With regard to the A96, we deploy safety cameras where they have the greatest potential to reduce injury from collisions and where there is evidence of collisions and speeding. There are a number of mobile camera sites on the A96, including a new site at Bainshole, which became operational in April 2021. Regular camera deployments continue to take place to encourage good driver behaviour, compliance with the speed limit and a continuing high level of safety on that route.

Greener Bus Transport

6. Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what progress it has made in 2021 to adopt greener bus transport across Scotland. (S6O-00503)

The Minister for Transport (Graeme Dey): In the year to 31 March 2021, the Scottish Government committed more than £71 million, supporting the purchase of 272 zero-emission buses awarded under the Scottish ultra-low-emission bus scheme, and unlocking more than £71 million of private investment from bus operators.

A new Scottish zero emission bus challenge fund was launched this year. It aims to support the bus, finance and energy sectors to establish a self-sustaining market for zero-emission buses and infrastructure. Bids have been submitted and are now being assessed. That will further support significant change in the bus market in favour of zero-emission technologies.

Liz Smith: Mr Dey is well aware that improving bus and train transport is absolutely key in persuading the public to go green rather than relying on extensive use of their cars. What is Mr Dey's reaction to the fact that First Bus has cancelled altogether the X53 service from Stirling to St Andrews and that Stagecoach has reduced the X56 service between Perth and Edinburgh, both of which are causing constituents across Mid Scotland and Fife serious inconvenience?

Graeme Dey: As I outlined in a previous answer, the relationship between the Scottish Government and the bus operators is laid out very clearly. One of the services to which the member referred will be the subject of a members' business debate next week, when we will be able to explore it in detail.

Clearly, we want to encourage the bus operators to maintain as many services as possible, especially during the pandemic, recognising of course that some of the issues that have arisen with the buses are down to driver shortages.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 7 has been withdrawn.

Energy Sector (West Scotland)

8. Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to support the energy sector in the West Scotland region. (S6O-00505)

The Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport (Michael Matheson): The Scottish Government has ambitious plans for offshore wind in Scotland, but that needs to come with economic returns that ensure that our local supply chain companies can benefit from the opportunities that such deployment presents. We are committed to co-designing a series of just transition plans for regions and sectors across the country, including the west of Scotland. Work on the energy strategy refresh and just transition plan has already begun, and it will consider how communities the length and breadth of Scotland can benefit from the transition to net zero.

Jamie Greene: The cabinet secretary will be aware that reactor 3 at Hunterston B nuclear power station was switched off last week after 45 years of service, supplying electricity to 1.7 million homes. It also supplied thousands of much-needed local jobs and contributed £54 million to the North Ayrshire economy every single year. Given that decommissioning will create limited job opportunities, why is there still no clear or obvious Government plan for any so-called just transition to renewable energy jobs for the hundreds of families who currently rely on that site for employment and economic prosperity?

Michael Matheson: The approach that the Scottish Government takes to energy and the development of energy projects is set out in our existing energy strategy, which, as the member will be aware, does not support the introduction of a costly and expensively subsidised nuclear industry.

I recognise that the decommissioning work at Hunterston B will be a long-term project that will maintain employment in the area over an

extended period of time, but the Scottish Government's priority is to make sure that we build an energy system that is based on targeting not only onshore and offshore wind but other parts of our renewables sector, such as tidal marine energy and the use of storage. We will set out more detail on that as we move forward with our energy strategy refresh, which will be published next year.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary agree that the renewable energy sector in West Scotland would be better placed to attract renewable investment if the United Kingdom Government did not continue to impose transmission charges that are higher than those anywhere else in the UK, which imposes an unfair financial burden on firms that are seeking to invest in Scotland?

Michael Matheson: The member makes a very important point about an issue that has been recognised across the energy sector for many years. Energy developments within Scottish waters—this also applies to some land-based projects in Scotland—are the most expensive to take forward in any part of the UK, as a result of the UK's transmission network, which has required to be reformed for many years.

I welcome the fact that the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets has indicated that it is open to considering a review of the existing system. That work needs to be progressed at pace, because the present arrangements are having a negative impact on the sector and the economic and environmental benefits that can come from greater development of renewables. It is unacceptable to have a regulatory system that is stacked against Scottish developments. The UK Government needs to take action to correct it, and should do so at pace.

Scotland's Redress Scheme

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a statement by John Swinney on Scotland's redress scheme. The Deputy First Minister will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:48

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney): As a Parliament, we have pledged to keep the promise that all of Scotland's children will grow up loved, safe and respected, but a rightly ambitious future should not obscure the need to shine light into darkness where it existed in the past.

On 11 March, the Parliament unanimously passed the Redress for Survivors (Historical Child Abuse in Care) (Scotland) Act 2021. I said then that it was one of the most important pieces of legislation that the Scottish Parliament would consider in its lifetime, and I gave a commitment that Scotland's redress scheme would open for applications by the end of this year.

Today, we are honouring that commitment and opening the scheme. From this afternoon, survivors of historical child abuse in care can apply for the redress that they deserve—a redress package that includes a payment of between £10,000 and £100,000 and access to support and apology. In some circumstances, next of kin can also apply for a redress payment of £10,000.

Across party lines, we have come together to confront the scale and horror of the abuse that Scotland's vulnerable children suffered. We cannot make up for that pain, and we cannot take away the devastating impact that it has had on people's lives, but we can, from today, provide acknowledgement and tangible recognition of the harm that has been caused, by offering redress to survivors through Scotland's redress scheme.

As a nation, we are taking this step together to acknowledge and address the injustices of the past. I hope that survivors and the families of those who are no longer with us, whose tenacity and determination have led us to this milestone, feel a sense of justice today. Out of the horror that they endured and the silence that they were forced to keep in childhood and beyond, they fought for recognition. Part of that recognition is delivered, today, by this scheme.

In September, Lady Smith, the chair of the Scottish child abuse inquiry, 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.”

We accept that the steps that the Government took to respond to survivors between 2002 and 2014—a period that spanned different Administrations—happened too slowly and did not go far enough. During that period, a significant number of survivors of childhood abuse in care in Scotland died. Lady Smith said:

“For them, justice delayed was justice denied.”

Today, 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. We apologise to the families of survivors who died before the inquiry began its work and before the redress scheme opened.

We know that many survivors are advancing in age and are seeing their health decline. That is why we launched the advance payment scheme in April 2019, which has now made payments to more than 700 survivors. That, too, is why we have worked as hard as we could to open the scheme as soon as possible after the legislation was passed.

The scheme will be delivered by the Scottish Government, which will be the main point of contact for applicants, and by Redress Scotland, which is the new independent body that will make decisions on eligibility and levels of redress payments that are to be offered to applicants. Everyone who is involved in both organisations carries with them a commitment that those who apply to the scheme will be treated with dignity, respect and compassion. Those three principles will be the hallmark of Scotland’s redress scheme.

I invite all survivors who are eligible for the scheme to consider applying, if it is the right choice for them. That is a personal choice, and there is funding for independent legal advice to help survivors to make the right choice for them.

Support is available at every stage of the application process. Caseworkers in the Scottish Government have been carefully recruited and understand that applying for redress is not an administrative task. For some applicants, it will be deeply emotional as they come to terms with their childhood and navigate the sensitivity in disclosing to others what they endured. Caseworkers will offer help on how to obtain supporting documents, advise on completing the application form and answer any questions that applicants may have.

We recognise that some people may decide that they need additional emotional support or feel that they would benefit from additional practical support, such as specialist help to access records. In those circumstances, caseworkers will be able to refer applicants to the redress support service,

which is a new, bespoke service that can provide access to external specialist services that use existing networks developed by the in-care survivors alliance. We also recognise that some applicants will want the independent support of a solicitor of their choosing. The redress scheme will pay fees for a solicitor to support applicants with their application.

There has been a strong survivor voice throughout the process of designing and developing the scheme, and I extend my sincere thanks to all survivors who have contributed their time, commitment and insight. Their input has been crucial in so many aspects, including developing the service, testing application forms and other materials, and helping in the selection of panel members for Redress Scotland. The first 20 panel members for Redress Scotland have been appointed through the public appointments process and come from a range of diverse backgrounds. Each panel member has undergone training to build on their experience and apply it to redress.

A huge volume of work has been undertaken at pace for the scheme to open for applications today. As the scheme becomes established in the weeks and months ahead, we will continue to work with survivors. We will listen and respond to the experience of applicants and refine and improve how the scheme operates.

A new survivor forum will be established early next year to ensure that applicants have a mechanism through which to continue to provide feedback and recommend improvements. There have been a number of opportunities for survivors to contribute their thoughts and ideas on shaping the survivor forum, which have included workshops and a questionnaire. Everyone who applies to the redress scheme can, if they wish, become a member of the survivor forum. It will be inclusive and accessible to all and will offer a range of ways to participate.

The scheme will be open for at least five years and we will raise awareness of it among survivors and their families so that as many as possible who are eligible have the opportunity to apply. That will build on the work that we have done to involve and engage survivors so far and on the learning that has been gained and the connections that have been established with relevant organisations and survivors through the advance payment scheme. As of today, that scheme will close to new applications. Applications that have already been received will continue to be processed.

Organisations that were responsible for the care of children at the time of the abuse have been asked to participate in Scotland’s redress scheme and to make fair and meaningful financial contributions to redress payments for survivors. In

successive consultations, survivors have told us that that is what they want. Those with a responsibility for the failings of the past have a responsibility to do the right thing today. This is a national endeavour and it is morally imperative that, collectively, we join together to believe and support those who were not believed and supported in the past.

The statement of principles according to which fair and meaningful contributions are assessed was published last week, in preparation for the launch. I welcome the organisations that are on the list of scheme contributors, which is published on the Scottish Government website today, and those that are finalising participation and will join imminently. Discussions with other organisations continue. I am confident that more will follow in addressing their legacy by joining our collective response in the days and weeks ahead.

The redress scheme is now open. Those who want to find out more can find application forms and guidance online at mygov.scot/redress. From 10 o'clock tomorrow morning, phone lines will open for those who would like hard-copy application packs to be posted to them. They can call 0808 175 0808 for survivor applications or 0808 281 7777 for next-of-kin applications. A team of specially trained caseworkers, working on behalf of the Scottish Government, will stand ready to help all applicants at each stage of the application process. The lines will be open from 10 am to 4 pm every Monday to Thursday until 21 December, when we will close the lines for the Christmas and new year break. They will reopen on 5 January.

When I announced in the Scottish Parliament that there would be a financial redress scheme, I also offered an unreserved apology on the Scottish Government's behalf to everyone who suffered abuse in care in Scotland. Today, I reiterate that apology to survivors and their families. Although we know that we cannot fully make up for the harm that was done and for our failure to take action sooner, we hope that that acknowledgment goes some way to redressing those wrongs.

Survivors of childhood abuse have had to endure unbearable pain. Today, by opening the redress scheme, we as a country take a further step in addressing that suffering, in the hope that our actions now will begin to address the failings of the past.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The Deputy First Minister will now take questions on the issues that were raised in his statement. I intend to allow around 20 minutes for questions, after which we will move on to the next item of business. I would be grateful if members who wish to ask a question could press their request-to-speak buttons now or

as soon as possible, or type the letter R in the chat function.

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): I thank the Deputy First Minister for advance sight of his statement. I add my absolute support. As he mentioned, we remain committed on a cross-party basis to the on-going success of the redress scheme as it opens. The issue rightly brought us together as a Parliament, and I am proud to have played my own small but meaningful part in the legislation.

There is much to welcome in the statement, which reflects the calls and asks of the survivor community—next-of-kin payments, funding for independent legal advice, a promise of a survivors forum and a commitment to the underlying principles of dignity, respect and compassion. More important, there has been a reiteration of the apology, to which I add the voice of members on the Conservative benches.

However, let me ask the Deputy First Minister a few specific questions on issues that I feel were not addressed. What forecasting has taken place regarding the potential scale and volume of the financial redress that may be sought and indeed paid out, given that the Government will underwrite the majority of the low-band payments?

What level of funding has been committed by those organisations that have rightly decided to participate in order to ensure that they pay a fair and meaningful share of the redress? How many organisations have failed to rise to the occasion and have shamefully refused to participate in the scheme?

Lastly, I will ask about the nature of local authority participation, as many authorities will be wondering about the effect that the scheme might have on them. What discussions have taken place with local authorities about their participation in the scheme so that they can participate in it meaningfully and do the right thing without jeopardising their ability to provide vital services to young people in our communities today?

John Swinney: I thank Mr Greene for his questions and I acknowledge the enormously helpful role that he played in the bill's passage through Parliament in the previous session. That was appreciated by me and by all members of the Parliament.

Mr Greene asked about forecasting. We have not changed our position from what was set out in the financial memorandum on the bill, which gave estimates—they will always be rough estimates, by their nature—of the volume of investment that will be required. He is correct that our financial approach is to pursue contributions from organisations, although the Government expects

to make a substantial financial contribution to the scheme over a number of years.

On the contributions that have been achieved to date, I note that more than £115 million has been committed to the scheme, of which £100 million is coming from Scottish local authorities. I welcome the contribution that local authorities are prepared to make to the scheme. The list of contributors is published on the Government's website today. We will continue to update it, as a number of contributions are specifically being negotiated at present. I therefore expect the list to change and develop over time. Some organisations will have waited to see the scheme get off the ground and to see others being prepared to take decisions to contribute. I thank those that have made contributions already, and we will pursue further discussions with individual parties.

Local authorities have been very constructive about the issue in their discussions, and we have come to an agreement that the local authority contribution will essentially be top-sliced from the Government's contribution to local authority funding over a number of years in order to spread the burden appropriately.

Mr Greene makes a valid point on an issue that, as he will know from the passage of the bill, we wrestled with at length in the legislative process, and this is where the thinking around fair and meaningful contributions comes in. We must take care to ensure that, while we pursue legitimate contributions for the past, we do not jeopardise the ability of organisations to provide vital services on which young people depend today. That sensitive balance will be applied by the Government.

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): I thank the Deputy First Minister for advance sight of his statement. I associate Labour members and the Labour Party with his eloquent and heartfelt words, and I reiterate the importance of the apology that has just been made. I hope that survivors may now feel, even in part, that they have been listened to and heard.

Today marks welcome progress in redressing the abuse that survivors have suffered, and it is welcome news that the scheme is now operational. What actions is the Government taking to further publicise the scheme in order to ensure maximum participation?

John Swinney: I thank Mr Marra for his comments. He is right to characterise the matter in that way and express the hope that survivors will feel listened to at this stage. As I placed on the record in answer to an urgent question on this point some weeks ago from Pauline McNeill, if my memory serves me correctly, the paragraph that I quoted from the report by Lady Smith is one of the most uncomfortable paragraphs written about

Government that I have had to respond to. I hope that survivors feel that we are now properly addressing the issues that they raised.

On publicity, an awareness campaign will be rolled out as part of the scheme's launch in order to maximise awareness and understanding of its existence. I am heartened that we had 700 applications to the advance payment scheme, as that suggests that word was able to get out. The advance payment scheme was available to only a limited proportion of the survivor community, and the fact that there were 700 successful applications gives me hope that we can get the message out. Nevertheless, we will put in a great deal of effort to ensure that that happens. I invite members of Parliament to support us in that endeavour, because it is vital that individuals are aware of the scheme so that they can make applications as appropriate.

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I thank the Deputy First Minister for his statement—not just its content, marking the milestones of applications to Redress Scotland, but his reiteration of the all-important apology to victims of historical child abuse. What reassurance can he give historical child abuse victims that they will be treated with dignity, respect and compassion throughout the application process?

John Swinney: I am not in any way surprised that Clare Adamson has put that question to me, because it was an amendment that she lodged, in her capacity as convener of the Education and Skills Committee in the previous session of Parliament, that inserted the words "dignity, respect and compassion" into the 2021 act as part of the founding principles of Redress Scotland and Scotland's redress scheme. I said at the time that that wording was an important addition because it would ensure that, in establishing the scheme, we would get off on exactly the right footing, whereby every individual will be treated with dignity, respect and compassion.

A couple of weeks ago—or it may have been only last week, now that I think about it—I had the pleasure of meeting the staff who will administer the scheme. I made the point to them that, from the first moment that a phone call from a survivor is answered in a Government office, that survivor must feel that there is dignity, respect and compassion. Having spoken to those members of staff, I know how committed they are to that work, which they view as an important task.

I have set out the importance that the Government attaches to the work being done properly, aided by the wording that Clare Adamson's amendment inserted in the legislation to ensure that the right values and ethos would underpin the scheme. I am confident that our staff will apply those values.

Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con):

In response to the Deputy First Minister's previous update on the scheme in June, it was noted that 25 per cent of applications to the advance payment scheme had been rejected. How will the Government continue to support survivors who struggle to access the appropriate records? Does the Deputy First Minister expect that that rate of rejection of applications will continue?

John Swinney: We wrestled with slightly different issues in the advance payment scheme, simply because of the eligibility criteria that it involved. I assure Meghan Gallacher and Parliament that we will support individuals in accessing records, because I recognise that that is a significant and potentially very stressful experience for them, and we want to minimise the risk of lack of availability of records being an obstacle to individuals accessing the scheme. That support will be there.

In addition, wider support for wellbeing will be available through a number of channels—I recounted some of them in my statement—in recognition of the fact that individuals may need non-financial support to enable them to navigate their way through what I recognise will be a very challenging period for them.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): What legal advice will be available to applicants who are going through the process?

John Swinney: Applicants will be able to obtain independent legal advice, and we have set out a framework as the basis on which that will be available to enable individuals to make a judgment about the scheme. As I indicated in my statement—we wrestled with the issue at length during the legislative process—the scheme is not for everybody. It may not be appropriate for certain people, but individuals must be able to make an informed judgment about whether it is or not, and that is an important part of the availability of legal advice.

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): I welcome the statement and in particular the apologies that have been made by the Scottish Government to survivors. Does the Deputy First Minister agree that, for many survivors, the additional practical and emotional support will be even more important than any financial compensation, and could he outline what work is being done to establish the redress support service, how much it is likely to cost and how we can ensure that it is properly resourced?

John Swinney: I accept Katy Clark's point that the surrounding support will be just as important for many individuals, and in some circumstances more important, than the available financial support. I hope that this move is viewed by

survivors as another means of helping to address their suffering, but I do not for a moment believe that financial compensation does that; if the wider support can do that, we will have helped people in a meaningful way.

The services need to be supported financially on an on-going basis. I do not have the sum of money to hand, but I will confirm it to Katy Clark in writing. The Government financially supports a range of schemes through which individuals are able to access support and assistance in coming to terms with their suffering, and the Government has given a long-term commitment to those endeavours.

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): What steps has the Scottish Government taken to ensure that the waiver scheme is fair?

John Swinney: The waiver scheme is a sensitive part of the scheme, and it was sensitive during the passage of the legislation. In the Government's view, and ultimately in the Parliament's view, it was the right measure to enable us to secure contributions. We have to make sure that, when individuals are making applications, they are doing so with the full knowledge and understanding of the issues with which they have to wrestle. Independent legal advice is crucial in equipping individuals to make a judgment on whether the scheme is appropriate for them and whether the waiver is appropriate for them to sign.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): I am pleased that Scotland's redress scheme has been established so quickly since the passing of the historic legislation at the end of the last parliamentary session. I also acknowledge the Deputy First Minister's apology, which he has repeated again today. We all agree that applicants should be treated with dignity, respect and compassion, and it is important that survivors have access to the survivors forum. How will Redress Scotland ensure that applicants are not retraumatised, and what plans does the Scottish Government have to continue raising awareness among survivors and families of the scheme during its lifetime?

John Swinney: There will be an on-going campaign to make sure that awareness is high. We will monitor the pattern of applications, and we have a good benchmark from the advance payment scheme of what may be a reasonable expectation of applications to come forward. We have to make sure that the work that surrounds the survivors forum is inclusive and gives a platform for survivors to have their input. I hope that what I have said today gives reassurance that the Government is interested on a continual basis to listen to survivors and understand how we can support the enhancement of the delivery of the

scheme to make the maximum impact on individuals who have suffered in the past.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: James Dornan joins us remotely.

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): I thank the Deputy First Minister for all his hard work in getting us to this point, along with the work of many others, of course. How were the newly appointed panel of 20 experts selected and what steps were taken to ensure that the recruitment vetting process was rigorous?

John Swinney: I thank Mr Dornan for his kind remarks. They prompt me to thank a range of civil servants who have worked extraordinarily hard since the passage of the act in March to ensure that we arrive at this moment. A huge amount of complex work has been undertaken. I gave them a timescale that, I suspect, was described in civil service parlance as heroic. They have risen to that heroic challenge and I am profoundly grateful to all of them for what they have contributed.

Redress Scotland recruited the panel of experts through the normal Scottish Government public appointments process, so those individuals were subject to a range of scrutiny. I had the pleasure of meeting the first grouping of panellists in the past couple of weeks. A very broad and diverse range of skills, experience and perspectives, including lived experience, has been brought into the panel. We will be well served by those individuals.

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): I thank the Deputy First Minister for sight of his statement and welcome the opening of the scheme this week. I also associate myself and my group with his heartfelt words. I hope that survivors will continue to feel heard throughout the operation of the scheme.

I also thank the Deputy First Minister for his recognition of the importance of providing non-financial redress, such as emotional and therapeutic support. I, too, would be interested in the information that he has agreed to provide to Katy Clark.

Will the Deputy First Minister give further details about the arrangements for reviewing the impacts of the waiver during the scheme's first 18 months of operation?

John Swinney: I will write to Katy Clark and place the letter in the Scottish Parliament information centre so that all members can have access to the information.

During the legislative process, I committed to a review of the waiver being undertaken; indeed, it is part of the legislation. Over the first 18 months, we will gather information and evidence to support the review. We will learn from individuals' experience about the effect of the waiver and will be keen to

ensure that we understand and apply it in the review. I will be happy to update Parliament about the progress of that review in due course.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I welcome the fact that a survivors forum will be established early next year. What mechanisms will be put in place to ensure that the forum's views and opinions will be acted on, along with any recommendations for improvement? Will the Deputy First Minister provide any further information on when the forum will be launched?

John Swinney: The forum will be launched swiftly once we begin to build up the engagement with survivors. I assure Mr Stewart that it will be able to submit its thoughts and views to Redress Scotland and the Scottish Government.

To go back to the point that I made to Mr Marra earlier, we must ensure that the voice of survivors is heard loud and clear in the process. If we have failed on that in the past, we cannot fail on it in future. That is uppermost in my thinking about how we engage survivors to learn of their perspective on the issues.

Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I thank the Deputy First Minister for clarification on the panel's selection. How will the newly appointed panel of 20 experts aid in delivering the redress scheme?

John Swinney: There will be two elements to that. First, the panellists will determine the applications independently of Government. The Government will do a lot of the work to prepare applications and support individuals to be application ready, but the decisions will be taken independently of Government in Redress Scotland.

The second element is that the panellists will be able to bring a fantastic range of expertise from a number of disciplines—social work, clinical psychology and legal services—and lived experience to the scheme's operation. It is important that we hear and understand those messages.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): Is it possible for the Deputy First Minister to outline how constituents can apply for support from caseworkers and independent legal support as mentioned in his statement? It would be very helpful if he could do that so that we could signpost it to our constituents.

John Swinney: The contact points that I mentioned in my statement will be available for individuals. However, I will write to all members to provide the necessary information that Sarah Boyack requests. It fits in with Mr Marra's point about the importance of there being wide awareness of the scheme. I will write to all

members shortly with all those details so that they can share the information widely in their local interactions.

Urgent Question

15:20

Storm Barra (Power Cuts)

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to restore power to households experiencing power cuts following storm Barra.

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):

Earlier today, the First Minister chaired a ministerial meeting of the Scottish Government's resilience room, which I and others attended, to ensure that appropriate power restoration measures are in place. There has been no pause in activities by either the power companies or the Scottish Government between storms Arwen and Barra.

Scottish Government officials remain in constant contact with power companies, and ministers are being briefed. Scottish Power Electricity Networks announced this morning that all power outages in its area had been reconnected, predominantly in the south of Scotland. It was confirmed that welfare support such as food vans had been deployed by Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks, and resilience partnerships continue to work on a range of welfare issues.

The power companies have also restated and published the range of support measures and compensation that are available to customers.

Michael Marra: With reports that there are still 600 premises without power, principally in my region of North East Scotland, and with further poor weather being forecast, it is imperative that the situation is resolved as soon as possible. Storm Barra, of course, comes straight after storm Arwen, and many residents have just seen their power supply restored after the damage that was caused last week.

Part of the widespread frustration—and, in some places, anger—that exists is around the lack of clear communication from the Government and the energy suppliers. The minister will surely agree that nine days without power is completely unacceptable. When exactly can customers expect power to be restored, and what guarantee can be given that the timing will not be pushed back again and again?

John Swinney: I acknowledge the inconvenience to members of the public and the hardship that comes with that, and I acknowledged that when I made a statement about storm Arwen last week. The issues that we have faced in relation to storm Barra have been of less gravity

than those faced in relation to storm Arwen. Following storm Arwen, all Scottish Power customers were reconnected to supply by Thursday of last week, and all but a handful of cases relating to Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks were reconnected by Saturday. A few isolated and unoccupied properties were connected on Sunday morning.

I have been advised that, at 8 minutes past 3, the total number of customers that are off supply is 511, most of whom are in the north-east of Scotland. The entire Scottish Power network is back up and running, subject to the fluctuations that take place on any normal day. The final restoration time for the last fault is expected to be 7 pm tonight.

Michael Marra: I thank the minister for that further information on the progress that has been made, even in recent hours. I know that a lot of hard work by the power companies will be continuing on the ground to reconnect properties.

However, concerns for vulnerable residents remain and lessons must be learned, as those weather events look set to continue. Can the cabinet secretary tell us the proportion of those who are deemed vulnerable who have been contacted and offered support? I believe that, in places, that was slow to happen last week. When can we expect to see results from the promised inquiry, so that greater resilience can be built ahead of future storms?

John Swinney: It is impossible for me to give Mr Marra a figure for the number of cases that have been contacted, because people were provided with varying levels of support for different lengths of time. However, there is a substantial issue, which I have been discussing with the power companies and the local resilience partnerships, whereby the power companies have an assessment of vulnerable customers and the local resilience partnerships have an assessment, but I am not confident that in all circumstances the assessments relate to the same grouping of individuals.

We must have a good understanding of the vulnerability of individuals and the circumstances in which they are vulnerable. An individual who has access to an electricity supply might be able to cope with their vulnerability, but the issue might relate to the interruption of another service. We will look closely at that question, because it is vital that we are able to deliver support to individuals when they are affected.

I have already commenced the review, and I expect the terms of reference to be finalised in the course of this week. I have discussed the matter with the power companies, and we will update Parliament as the review makes progress. We

recognise that there is an immediate necessity to strengthen arrangements wherever possible, because we might face further such incidents over the winter.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): There are a number of supplementary questions, and I am keen to take them all. I ask members to be as brief as possible with the questions and responses.

Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con): As the two storms have battered Scotland, flooding has been a serious concern. What assessment is being made of the damage to flood defences, and what extra measures are being put in place over the winter to deal with further storms?

John Swinney: The Scottish Environment Protection Agency operates a system of alerts that take into account all the aspects of different forms of flooding. The worry of coastal flooding was particularly acute in relation to storm Barra, but in the south of Scotland, in the Annan area, the issue is river-based flooding. Mr Golden represents a region that has a number of different and challenging circumstances that are relevant to the issue.

The issue of flood defences will be reviewed by the relevant authorities, and the Government will engage in that exercise. SEPA undertakes a lot of work to survey the flood risk across the country, and ministers expect to be updated on any lessons to be learned from that work.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I have been contacted by constituents regarding the disruptive impact of storm Barra on parts of the south-west, in the Rhins of Galloway, including Ardwell, Sandhead and Drummore. What engagement has the Scottish Government had with Dumfries and Galloway Council regarding the impact of storm Barra, and what support is the Government able to offer the local authority to help those who are living in affected areas?

John Swinney: The Government's regional resilience co-ordinators are in place and are supporting local responders across Scotland, including in the Dumfries and Galloway area. I recognise the challenges from coastal flooding that will have taken place in those communities.

In relation to financial support, my colleague the Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth, who is sitting alongside me on the front bench here, has activated the Bellwin scheme in relation to both storm Arwen and storm Barra. That opens up the opportunity for local authorities to put to the Government legitimate financial claims for consideration.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries)

(Con): As the Deputy First Minister is well aware, there has been severe damage across the coast of Dumfries and Galloway. In particular, 40 feet of Drummore harbour has been destroyed. It is a huge setback for the community group, which only recently took over ownership of the harbour with a view to providing more marine-based services to support the fragile local economy.

Will the Government commit to engaging and working with the community to address that devastating setback to its ambitions?

John Swinney: I am delighted to give that commitment. As Mr Carson might recall, a few weeks ago, in the aftermath of a previous storm incident, I visited Annan. One of the issues was the loss of two significant footbridges, and I agreed to engage constructively with the local community once it had had an opportunity to consider its next steps.

With regard to the circumstances at Drummore, the involvement of a community group is a welcome endeavour, and we will happily engage with it to see what we can put in place to practically support its efforts.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): Following storm Arwen, it is estimated that more than 1,000,000m³ of timber has been blown down in Scotland, which is about 20 per cent of the annual harvest. Yesterday, when I visited Berwickshire to see the devastation, constituents told me that felling legislation urgently needs to be revisited in the light of the storm, to help the industry with the clear-up and replanting. What additional resource is being provided to Scottish Forestry to fast-track those applications?

John Swinney: We will look at that issue. I acknowledge the reality of the point that Rachael Hamilton puts to me. Some of the aerial footage showing the loss of forestry stock is terrifying. Obviously, practical steps have to be taken to resolve the situation. We have a great deal of expertise to bring to the discussion, and I will make sure that the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands can engage appropriately with the industry. The Government will take whatever steps are necessary to assist in any way.

Scotland Loves Local

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

The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-02442, in the name of Tom Arthur, on Scotland Loves Local. I invite members who wish to participate in the debate to press their request-to-speak button now or as soon possible, or to place an R in the chat function if they are joining us online.

15:31

The Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth (Tom Arthur): I am delighted to bring this debate to Parliament, which allows all MSPs the opportunity to show their support for the Scotland Loves Local campaign, which supports local businesses, jobs and building community wealth. Now—the run up to Christmas—is a good time to reflect on that.

The past 21 months has taught us a lot about what really matters. We have all lived our lives a bit closer to our homes, appreciated more what is on our doorstep, rediscovered green spaces, our local shops and businesses, and reconnected to our local communities and all that they have to offer.

Our constituents, communities and local businesses the length and breadth of the country have rolled up their sleeves, mobilised and worked creatively, and with agility, to develop local solutions to look after one another and support those who need it.

We have realised that being able to go to the shops and buy whatever we need is a privilege not to be taken for granted. Today, I want to celebrate the contribution of our local businesses and communities to Scottish life, in supporting us and in providing opportunity and employment. I ask Parliament to support us to do the same in return.

Loving local is not only about helping people to live well locally. It also has so much potential to support our strategic ambitions for a just transition to net zero, an inclusive wellbeing economy and tackling inequality. It is about bringing the Government's programmes together in each place to deliver shared priorities.

Our joint ambition must be a future that has good places and localism at its heart—where we embrace local supply chains, build community wealth by getting behind local businesses and enterprises, support community regeneration,

revive our town centres, grow accessible transport, active travel and services, work together with communities and move towards net zero in everything that we do.

Our shared experience during the pandemic has demonstrated the potential of local communities and businesses to use their local knowledge, expertise and commitment to successfully respond and adapt to big challenges in their own way.

The pandemic has highlighted the extent to which local economies are determined by their context—the characteristics of a place and the people who live there, and the regional and national policy framework in which they operate. That is why we take a place-based approach.

At its heart, any place-based approach is simply a practical way of looking at how to tackle challenges and take advantage of opportunities at a scale that is meaningful and helpful. To support places, we need to really understand the everyday experience of people's lives, and to respond with local initiatives that are designed to improve the lives of businesses and communities across Scotland—in our cities, towns, neighbourhoods and rural and island geographies.

I am therefore pleased that this year we have been able to launch our Scotland Loves Local programme, which aims to encourage people to think and choose local. The £10 million, multi-year programme is designed to support recovery and to influence behaviours in order to embed the loves local culture that we started to witness during the pandemic. The programme encourages a safe return to our town and city centres, while taking care to follow guidelines to look after one other.

I look forward to seeing the benefits of that funding, as I am sure we all are. It enables projects that support local businesses to love local in the festive season, such as digital trails in Oban; projects to improve town and city centres, such as streetscape improvements in Dunoon; a cultural and arts project in Helensburgh; and a marketplace project in the Western Isles.

Ahead of small business Saturday last weekend, the First Minister and the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy, Kate Forbes, urged people to support their local independent traders this festive season.

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): Does the minister feel that all shops and services should be supported, including butchers? Obviously, his Green party partners are against that.

Tom Arthur: I do not know what motivated that intervention. To be honest, I think that this is an opportunity to celebrate our local businesses and local communities, and that is the tone that I will

set at the start of the debate. It will be up to the member whether he wishes to follow suit.

I encourage members, as well as supporting their local communities, to encourage their constituents and their family members to buy the Scotland Loves Local gift card for loved ones this Christmas. It is an innovative way of keeping spend local for longer and enabling people to treat themselves to the best retail, hospitality and experiences on offer in their area, whether in store or online, as long as the online business has a bricks-and-mortar presence in the local authority area.

In June, I was delighted to be able to launch the Scotland Loves Local awards. Recently, I was very pleased to see the wide range of winners who were presented with their awards at the Scotland's Towns Partnership conference, which I attended. The awards recognise and thank some of the people who work tirelessly to support the resilience and vitality of our town centres, whether by embracing creativity, committing to tackling climate change or being a hero for their high street. I congratulate all the award winners. I will highlight a couple of examples of their work.

I congratulate East Ayrshire Council and Kilmarnock business association, which were awarded a judges' special prize in recognition of the wide-ranging impact of the local gift card on fuelling local recovery. I say well done to the young people in Strathearn and Strathallan who developed a community radio station that broadcasts locally. Their award recognised the talent that the station champions and their creation of a community hub, which promotes local businesses and creates jobs, thus helping the local economy.

Looking to the future, we are exploring the opportunity to support low-income households using loves local cards, through a pilot project with Citizens Advice Scotland. The project seeks to offer an alternative to food bank referrals and works alongside our primary cash-first response to the need to reduce food insecurity. It is an example of our work across portfolios on our overall localism ambition, which our Scotland Loves Local programme supports.

Continuing with support for businesses across portfolios, we are working with Scotland's Towns Partnership to support our local food and drink sector by encouraging retailers to buy locally and source more Scottish produce and by raising consumer awareness of our fantastic local offerings.

We have also worked on a range of initiatives to support local tourism recovery. They include the destination and sector marketing fund; the ScotSpirit holiday voucher programme, which

represents social tourism at its best; and the tourism and hospitality talent development programme, which is designed to motivate and develop local talent. We have also allocated £4 million to the days out incentive scheme.

So that loving local can become a long-term strategic approach, we are working collaboratively through our community wealth building approach, the draft fourth national planning framework, “Housing to 2040”, the town centre review and the route map to deliver car kilometre reductions in order to set out our vision of creating places that people enjoy and where they want to live, work and settle. We want to create places where people can thrive and bring up families, that meet their needs locally and that support their health and wellbeing. That is why we will take action to make housing and places work together seamlessly so that people can live in communities and 20-minute neighbourhoods, with ease of access to their thriving town and city centres via public transport and active travel.

Collaboration and partnership are and will continue to be vital to everything that we do. Our business improvement districts are a good example of the Scotland Loves Local approach and are a mechanism for businesses to work together with their communities. The BID’s hyperlocal knowledge, leadership and partnership have ensured that many of our cities, town centres and neighbourhoods have remained resilient.

For example, the Stirling and Alloa BID’s led strategic partnerships, with their local authorities and chambers of commerce, to provide support with personal protective equipment and emergency grants to their members. BID4Oban led a town-wide communication and support campaign and set up a business counselling service to support struggling business owners, and the service was then made available to businesses nationally.

The action that communities have taken in response to the pandemic is recognised in our Covid recovery strategy as a key part of the resilience of our communities. Communities have used their distinct local knowledge, expertise and commitment to successfully respond and adapt to big challenges in their own way. Our vision for community-led regeneration, supported by our place-based investment and empowering communities programmes, enables our communities to help shape their own futures. The investment is helping them to develop community assets, enabling them to generate income and in turn supporting the creation of new jobs and access to services that benefit the people in their communities.

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Obviously, there have been

successful examples of that across Scotland, although others are less successful. How many new jobs does the minister hope might be created through some of the work that the Scottish Government and local councils are doing to regenerate high streets?

Tom Arthur: I cannot give an exact number but, although the regeneration of high streets is an important aspect, we have to be more ambitious and look more broadly at the community wealth building model and the opportunities that it presents. It is about leveraging big-spending public bodies locally to support small and medium-sized enterprises and social enterprises. We can have more money circulating in our local economies, and a move away from the wealth extraction model. The opportunities are really quite exciting.

As we advance the community wealth building agenda in this session of Parliament, all parties can come together and work on that. I commend the excellent work that is taking place in local authorities across Scotland that are led by political parties of all persuasions in supporting the community wealth building agenda. As I say, the potential for supporting dynamic local economies and jobs growth is limitless, and I hope that we can work on that constructively throughout this session. We cannot achieve our ambitions without working with and for our communities, or without real participation and engagement and harnessing our collective resources for local impact.

Before I conclude, I want to say that I am looking forward to presenting the SURF—Scotland’s Regeneration Forum—awards tomorrow and to meeting some of the people who will receive the awards and hearing more about their endeavours and the conditions required for success. The awards provide welcome recognition for those who support their community to thrive. That is what Scotland Loves Local is all about.

We should not lose sight of the sense of connectedness, belonging and strength that our local communities and businesses have shown. I hope that members will support the loves local ambition and will encourage their constituents to do so, too, by safely visiting local markets, shops and businesses if they can, and by enjoying all that their local neighbourhood has to offer. In moving the motion, I ask us all to think globally and to live and love locally.

I move,

That the Parliament supports the ambition to love local and enable people to live well in their communities by encouraging people to think and choose local, supporting local businesses and jobs and building community wealth; commends the efforts of communities since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in working together to support each other and local businesses; congratulates the winners of

the Scotland Loves Local awards announced in November 2021, and welcomes the Scottish Government's commitments on 20-minute neighbourhoods, the transformation of safe spaces for walking, wheeling and cycling, a just transition to net zero, an inclusive wellbeing economy, tackling inequality, and community-led regeneration.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We have a bit of time in hand, so I encourage members to make and take interventions—members will get the time back for that. I give a gentle reminder to the members who want to participate in the debate but who have not yet pressed their request-to-speak button that they should do so as soon as possible.

15:44

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): I remind members of my entry in the register of members' interests, which shows that I am still a councillor at Aberdeen City Council.

It is absolutely right that we recognise the contribution that our local producers continue to make to our economy and to the wellbeing of our communities. I add my congratulations to everyone who is up for an award at the event tomorrow night that the minister mentioned.

Over the past two years, businesses and citizens have been hit hard by the Covid pandemic. Figures from the Scottish Retail Consortium show that, in November, footfall in Glasgow city centre, for example, was down 22 per cent compared with that in the equivalent period in 2019. That picture has been replicated across Scotland over the past couple of years. More and more people are switching to online shopping as a result of the pandemic, with obvious consequences for our high streets. Today, the Conservative Party is offering not just welcome words but concrete policy solutions to help our struggling high streets and food sectors.

Last month, 13 industry bodies wrote to Kate Forbes asking for rates relief for retail businesses to be included in her budget tomorrow. The organisations warned the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy that the retail industry potentially faces scarring from the pandemic for years to come and that the many challenges that businesses are facing would be "insurmountable" without direct Scottish Government help.

Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP): Does the member acknowledge that the 100 per cent rates relief for retail and hospitality businesses this year has been far more generous than the relief that has been provided by any other part of the United Kingdom?

Douglas Lumsden: Absolutely—it is fantastic that the UK Government has been able to provide the devolved Government with so much money

that it has been able to offer that relief. Businesses are concerned with what will be in this year's budget and what relief will be provided. The Scottish Government needs to listen and act on that.

In November, shop vacancy rates hit a six-year high, at 16 per cent. The latest Scottish Retail Consortium and Local Data Company figures show that, on the high street, the number of vacancies is still on the increase. The Scottish Government needs to act on that, too.

According to the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, local authorities, to which many retailers turn for help, have had a real-terms reduction in general funding of about 20 per cent, once additional obligations have been factored in. However, instead of helping local authorities to release funding for high streets, the Scottish National Party devolved Government's solution is to further ring fence funding for projects through Holyrood diktat. No longer can local authorities focus on local solutions to local problems; instead, they have their hands tied behind their backs with ring-fenced funding for national projects.

The SNP devolved Government talks a lot about partnership working, yet the bodies that do more to protect our high streets than any others are our local authorities, and the SNP continues to reduce their funding hand over fist.

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): Does the member think that the pedestrianisation of Union Street, which his administration has pushed through, will help local shops on that street?

Douglas Lumsden: It is fantastic that the member brings up that issue, because that pedestrianisation project can go ahead only because of £20 million from the UK Government's levelling up fund. The administration in Aberdeen is looking to enhance the area, whereas the SNP just has talk and wants to manage decline.

If the SNP were serious about protecting our communities, it would be giving local authorities the fair funding settlement that they have asked for. I hope—but doubt—that the finance secretary will have good news for our friends and colleagues in local government tomorrow.

Of course, the issues for our local high streets did not start in the past two years; they have faced challenges for the past 14 years. Many major brands have moved to out-of-town sites or online. That is another example of the SNP taking its eye off the ball.

To rebuild our communities following the pandemic, we need to tackle the long-standing problems that have emptied our high streets and undermined local businesses—high business

rates, poor infrastructure and overzealous planning policy. We need to transform our high streets into more diverse places where people can go to live, work, eat, do activities and shop, but councils need Government assistance to be able to do that.

Local authorities were given the ability to introduce rate rebate schemes, which, as a leader of a local authority, I was itching to use. They were given that power, but they were not given the ability to raise funds to pay for any scheme. It was just a way for the Scottish Government to pass the buck to local authorities.

Tom Arthur: From his perspective of being a leader in a council administration, the member raises an interesting point about challenges around the allocation of money and the limited ability to raise funding. Does he recognise that the Scottish Government finds itself in that position? With that in mind, if he wishes to see further funding for local government, from what other portfolios would he take it? For example, the member still supports all health consequential going to the national health service.

Douglas Lumsden: It is rather strange to hear an SNP minister talking about how the Scottish Government can spend its money, when we see the amount of ring fencing that local government has. If the same amount of ring fencing came to a Scottish Government budget, I am sure that we would hear it talked about loudly.

We need to look at ways to exempt high streets and town centres from business rates and relax planning laws for redevelopment in those areas. Our manifesto was packed full of measures to help our high streets, which included changes to the small business bonus scheme; delaying the introduction of new non-Covid business regulations until 2023; and superfast fibre broadband to all businesses by 2027. In food production, we promised a Scotland first approach—a national food strategy to promote local produce and double the size of the food and drink sector by 2030—and a farm to fork review of Scotland's food policy as a key element of Covid recovery.

The purpose of those policies is to boost demand for Scottish produce; strengthen the bargaining powers of producers, supporting them to upscale and export; better label Scottish produce—even clottie dumplings—and ensure that public procurement utilises Scottish produce whenever possible.

We want to promote Scottish produce at home and abroad, without fear of a Twitter onslaught or threats against those businesses. I ask the minister to join me today in condemning those who damage Scottish businesses by attacking and

threatening them on social media just because they dare to promote Scottish goods in England on small business Saturday.

What we have today from the devolved Scottish Government is a motion that contains no commitments at all—no policy drivers, no help for local authorities and no funding to help our worn-out high streets. One shop owner in a small town in the Borders posted on Facebook the other day just how exhausted she was and how much the pandemic had hurt, not just financially but emotionally—she has had sleepless nights, fears of another lockdown, and worry about her staff and her supply chains.

It is not just about finances for many of those businesses, but about their heart and soul, their family businesses and the contribution that they are making to their communities. All those businesses look for is a bit of help and light at the end of the tunnel, not just warm words and platitudes.

Tomorrow, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy will set out the Scottish Government budget for the next year. I hope that it will include some of the measures that I have mentioned. I hope that it will provide funding and support for our small businesses as well as a bit of reassurance about the future, which our businesses are looking for. I hope that it will also provide for the great work of our business improvement districts—I completely agree with the minister on that point—and that it will give more funding to local government so that we can get on with the business of supporting our high streets. Warm words are great, but we want action.

I move amendment S6M-02442.2, to leave out from “and welcomes” to end and insert:

“; notes with concern Scottish Retail Consortium figures, which indicate that footfall for November 2021 was down by a fifth from November 2019; recognises, however, that Scotland's high streets and town centres were struggling long before the COVID-19 pandemic began, and calls on the Scottish Government to deliver a budget on 9 December for 2022-23 that will drive local recovery by extending 75% non-domestic rates relief to retail, leisure, newspaper and hospitality businesses, and deliver a fair funding settlement to local authorities, so that they can properly invest in regenerating and supporting high streets and town centres.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I encourage members to continue the debate with making and taking interventions as has just been demonstrated.

15:53

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): It is a privilege to represent South Scotland. The region does not have any cities yet, but it has many unique, proud and diverse towns and places.

Prior to being an MSP, I had the privilege of being a councillor on Dumfries and Galloway Council, representing the Dumfries town centre ward of Nith for a decade. When I was elected in 2007, a major developer was on the cusp of building a new shopping centre in the town, with Debenhams as the anchor shop. To support the project, the council bought a shop on Dumfries High Street on land that would have been the entrance to the planned centre. Then, the global economic crisis landed, the recession began and our high streets were hit hard. The developer's plans were dropped.

Since then, the council has taken a number of initiatives to support town and village centres, many of which I am pleased to have proposed, including a town centre housing fund and various public realm improvements. Those interventions were an attempt to make our towns that bit more attractive, and to recognise that after 40 years of retail growth—increasingly on greenfield out-of-town sites—and 20 years of internet shopping growth, which now makes up more than a third of retail sales in the UK, consumer behaviour had changed, with convenience and price often being the main drivers in our increasingly busy lifestyles. Consumers are no longer prepared to change their lifestyle to visit high street shops as often as they once did, and instead want a retail offer that suits their new lifestyle.

There was a need to try to reimagine our town centres, to celebrate their history and identity, to give people new reasons to come into and live in our town centres again, and to then support the smaller retail sector that remained. Wonderful examples of developing that sense of place are at work across South Scotland, including initiatives such as Wigtown booktown, Castle Douglas food town, Kirkcudbright artists' town and, most recently, Moffat dark sky town. I am tempted to say that Dumfries is the football town, but perhaps I will not, after the past few weeks.

However, those efforts are increasingly being swamped by the sheer weight of the economic and social tsunami that our retailers are facing, which has been exacerbated by the pandemic but was by no means caused by it. There has been an acceleration in the number of shop closures, but the cost base in our towns remains far too high, so they cannot compete with out-of-town locations and online shopping.

Many landlords are often absentee pension funds. I remember phoning one pension fund landlord to complain about trees growing through the windows of a property and the pension fund denying that it owned the building. The reality was that it did not even know that it owned the building. Those absentee companies often seek rent levels

from a bygone age and are utterly divorced from the current reality.

We need to cut costs and raise footfall for the people who want to do business in our towns. That is why Labour's amendment sets out two measures that we have asked the Government to consider as part of its budget. First, we want to see at least 50 per cent rates relief for retail, hospitality and leisure properties, which would be similar to the level that was offered to businesses in England in the new financial year. That would ensure that Scotland's businesses are not put at an economic disadvantage.

Secondly, we need immediate fiscal stimulus to encourage people safely back into our town centre shops. The Northern Ireland spend local voucher scheme is a great example of how we can inject cash directly into our local shops. The scheme was delivered by the Department for the Economy and it offered everyone aged over 18 in Northern Ireland a £100 voucher to spend in local businesses until 14 December. Data from the Northern Ireland Retail Consortium shows that, in November, the number of shoppers increased to its highest level since before the pandemic and was down just 5.2 per cent on 2019, which can be compared with the rest of the UK, which saw falls of between 16 per cent and 20 per cent.

Retail Northern Ireland chief executive Glyn Roberts told the *Belfast Telegraph* that the scheme had been an

"invaluable short term boost for thousands of local independent retailers".

That is exactly the type of initiative that we need from the Scottish Government. That is why Scottish Labour is proposing an ambitious fiscal stimulus package to aid economic recovery that includes a £50 voucher for every adult to spend in bricks-and-mortar retail outlets.

There must also be long-term solutions. At the start of my speech I mentioned a property on Dumfries High Street that would have been the entrance to a shopping centre that never happened, and never will. That property was community transferred by the council to a new community benefit company—Midsteeple Quarter—thereby kick-starting its work to take back the High Street shop by shop. The company is now investing in that property and others to deliver the mix of uses our town needs, including good-quality retail space that is affordable for local businesses, community space and new housing. Its co-operative principle recognises that local people have the innovative solutions for their town, and that they should have a stake in its future through community ownership. That really is loving local. I commend the Midsteeple Quarter project to

the minister, and invite him to visit to find out for himself the difference that it is making.

More importantly, I urge the Government to ensure that, at the heart of its policies on town centres is investment to support that bottom-up, community-led approach to regeneration, recognising in particular that developing housing in town centres comes with additional costs and needs to be supported.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): Colin Smyth talks about Midsteeples Quarter and putting housing back into town centres. Could some of that housing be passive housing, because that would also help to tackle fuel poverty?

Colin Smyth: That is a very good question. One of the issues is that such housing costs more, even if it is in the town centre. It is easy for a social landlord to build a square box on a greenfield site, but it is more expensive to do it on a brownfield site in a town centre. That needs to be reflected when it comes to funding from Government to social landlords and others. They should focus on passive housing and other good-quality accommodation in our town centres.

I find little to disagree with in the Government's motion. For example, 20-minute neighbourhoods and 10 per cent of transport funding going towards active travel are Labour manifesto commitments, although I am disappointed that public transport does not merit a mention in the motion.

On active travel, I hope that lessons are learned from the spaces for people initiative. Although, in many cases, it created welcome safe spaces, a majority of investment was concentrated in just two cities, and it took funding away from permanent active travel infrastructure, which was instead used for pop-up initiatives. In some cases, those temporary projects alienated communities, which undermined active travel.

There is no recognition in the motion that, in rural areas, our market towns serve communities that are often more than 20 minutes away, where car use is not a luxury but a necessity. We need to be careful not to make our town centres inaccessible for shop deliveries, and that we do not make customer parking too expensive, because that will simply accelerate the consumer trends towards out-of-town and online shopping that I outlined.

However, my main criticism of the Government's motion is that, while the Scotland Loves Local campaign is very well meaning and supports a lot of positive local initiatives, it does not go far enough. We are often in danger of debating the merits of a sticking plaster when the reality is that, at the moment, our patient needs major surgery.

Therefore, I am happy to move Labour's amendment in my name, which I think will support and strengthen the Government's motion. It goes further than the Tory amendment in the level of support that it offers, and it recognises the urgency of the crisis that our town centres face by proposing an urgent and immediate response. We need to seize the opportunity and be ambitious. If we are, we can deliver a real recovery for Scotland's towns.

I move amendment S6M-02442.1, to insert at end:

“; recognises that local businesses will play a key role in Scotland's wider economic recovery but that, after months of closures and restrictions, many businesses still face an uncertain future; believes that, consequently, further support is needed in order to sustain and boost our town centres, and calls, therefore, on the Scottish Government to extend the 50% rates relief, which is available in England for retail, hospitality and leisure sectors, to these businesses in Scotland so they are given equal support on their road to recovery, and to produce a £50 high street voucher to provide a cash stimulus for these businesses and encourage footfall in local communities.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Although I encourage interventions, I gently remind members to make and respond to interventions through the chair.

We move to the open debate. I call Fiona Hyslop.

16:01

Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP): Local businesses are the economic beating heart of our communities and, of course, their contribution provides opportunity for regeneration, resilience and development.

Our town centres also offer us a sense of culture and place, and we are rightly proud to support them through initiatives such as Scotland Loves Local—especially when we look at what our town centres have experienced over the past challenging 20 months. Local resilience and sustainability were always valued, but now they must be at a premium.

The Scottish Government's Scotland Loves Local initiative highlights the importance of choosing local and promoting community wealth—but community wealth is not measured only in cash terms. A thriving town centre depends on its people. People provide drive, spirit and passion, and it is often our local businesspeople who lead that.

In my home town of Linlithgow, which the minister visited this summer, the two business improvement districts came together with Linlithgow Community Development Trust in October 2019 to create One Linlithgow, which is the first such BID in Scotland. It brings together

local businesses of all sizes and the community groups that help them to thrive and survive.

With the Scottish Government's business resilience funding, One Linlithgow was able to offer a tailored response to local businesses by offering face masks and distancing posters to some, and assisting others with advice on how to continue trading safely. With the help of volunteers, it organised grand reopening hampers and offered assistance to businesses on what Government support they were entitled to. One Linlithgow also used the resilience funding to establish digital markets, which made more than £7,000 for local businesses in their first 10 days of going live. The uniqueness of that collaborative approach, which was hailed by the minister on his visit, is one that is rooted in community support and resilience.

With the addition of the Scotland Loves Local fund, local organisations and businesses are continuing to work collaboratively through providing an outdoor market and developing their informative website, www.mylinlithgow.com.

In other parts of my constituency, the Green Action Trust in Broxburn and the Broxburn and Uphall Development Group received £20,000 and £8,000 of funding, respectively. They plan to create a community green space, which will promote good physical and mental health.

Only yesterday, the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands visited Scotmid in Broxburn in my constituency—it is a popular place—with the Scottish Grocers Federation, to promote the Scottish Government's go local programme, which drives sales of local food. In the first 10 stores alone, there has been a 40 per cent increase in sales and additional sales of Scottish food worth close to £1 million.

In Bathgate, where I started my Christmas shopping at the weekend on small business Saturday, Choose Bathgate's campaign is very active. Its Facebook pages are filled with businesses including the Phoenix Health and Wellness Centre. As well as championing businesses, it encourages shoppers to explore Bathgate's High Street.

I say to Colin Smyth that, in my view, Scotland Loves Local and the gift card scheme should also be about tackling inequality. Giving free money to all, which has been the approach in Northern Ireland, is one way of doing things. However, in Scotland, my preference would be that councils or—as I think we heard—Citizens Advice Scotland provide funded gift cards to the most vulnerable people in our communities, thereby targeting poverty at the same time as supporting local businesses. I hope that Colin Smyth will consider that approach.

Our town centres show others who we are and where we have been, and they have the power to shape where we want to go. By supporting Scotland Loves Local, we are investing not only in the local economy but in our people, in local innovation and creativity, in our culture and in our sense of place.

An important lesson is that ideas will come from local businesses, and not necessarily from what can be seen as remote councils or, indeed, a remote Government. That is a strong lesson that we should learn. Our local businesses suffered under lockdown because they closed in order to keep us safe. We must now, in turn, keep them safe. We must ensure that they thrive by coming together as a community and continuing to shop local and supporting Scotland Loves Local.

16:05

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): For many, Covid-19 has dramatically changed how we shop. That is particularly the case for how we shopped for food during the lockdown. With the right support, it looks as if that welcome trend may continue.

In the main, people shopped less frequently but more locally. The shift to buying local was partly down to necessity, as many of the larger supermarket chains closed their doors to new online orders because of manpower restrictions, but our local businesses stepped up to the mark and went above and beyond to open their doors in many cases. Roan's Dairy in my constituency, for example, increased deliveries of milk to those who were self-isolating, which was a lifeline service. I hope that such businesses are now set to benefit greatly in the coming months and years.

A recent survey revealed that 84 per cent of people want to buy more local food and drink than they did previously, which is welcome news for anybody, but particularly for our family businesses across the country. That trend was highlighted in a recent survey that was carried out in Dumfries and Galloway, which found that a growing number of people intend to buy directly from producers and retailers in their communities. That is great news for many on our local high streets, whose businesses have suffered badly from the pandemic and online trading. However, given some of the comments from members, it is apparent that greater support is needed for our struggling high streets, which I hope will come forward in the budget tomorrow.

Food and drink is now the largest, fastest-growing and most valuable economic sector in Dumfries and Galloway. It is worth £1.2 billion and—crucially—it employs more than 9,000 people. That figure does not include local

butchers, bakers and farm shops. The food and drink sector is the engine of our region's economy and everything that is possible must be done to ensure that that continues. It needs more than nice slogans and good intentions.

Meaningful support must be given to improve local infrastructure. The problem is particularly acute in my constituency, which, despite being one of the biggest beef and lamb-producing areas in Scotland, has limited processing capacity and no abattoir. Local authorities need to support local producers to participate in public procurement and authorities must not use centralised procurement for marginal price-per-unit gains that benefit nobody and—crucially—only work against producers such as Galloway dairy farmers, who are right in the middle of the milk fields of Scotland.

Local food and drink producers must be supported in their ambitions by a boots-on-the-ground approach, not a one-size-fits-all growth pathway that regularly misunderstands the drivers of rural enterprise.

Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP): Does Mr Carson accept and give credit for the fact that the fastest-growing sector in Scotland is the food and drink sector and that “Ambition 2030: A growth strategy for farming, fishing, food and drink” aims to double its value between now and 2030? Does he accept that that would not have happened without the intervention of the Scottish National Party Government, when Richard Lochhead set up the first national food and drink policy for Scotland?

Finlay Carson: I absolutely accept that Scotland is growing more in that respect than many thought it would, but I will not thank Richard Lochhead for anything that he did as minister for agriculture, given a lot of the failures.

We must realise that diversity in business is something to celebrate. Diversity of breed, approach and business model creates resilience, especially in rural communities such as Dumfries and Galloway. There must be honest investment in local organisations and local enablers that understand how to make things work.

It is important to recognise examples of good practice where, against all the odds, small organisations and producers are doing outstanding work, such as the supply chain development work done by the Galloway Cattle Society, which has turned around an at-risk native breed and is working directly with the supermarket giant Aldi. There is every chance that Galloway beef will be on the menu in many households this Christmas.

I praise the collaborative approach taken by Dumfries and Galloway Farmers and Community

Markets Association, which is a network of about a dozen community markets that creates trading opportunities for more than 70 local businesses. It shares knowledge, equipment and expertise that ultimately makes local food and drink accessible to rural people.

Galloway justifies its reputation as a land of high-quality primary production and food-manufacturing knowledge and expertise. Sadly, however, the sector has undeveloped potential. We can all ask for, encourage and support change that will lead to greater job growth across the region. More thought must be given to ensuring that key procurement contracts for hospitals and council services are awarded to local businesses.

The Covid pandemic has absolutely proven that shorter supply chains are more resilient and sustainable. The Scottish Government must do more to work in tandem with farmers, growers, processors, wholesalers, distributors and retailers to lessen our need for food imports and grow and promote our UK and Scottish food and drink industry.

More young people should be nurtured to consider moving into the agriculture and fishing sectors in the near future, if we are to prosper and grow. Unlocking economic potential means growing and seizing emerging markets and opportunities, with businesses—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to close now.

Finlay Carson: I certainly will. We have fantastic businesses in Dumfries and Galloway that I would love to have mentioned. Covid has presented us with a shorter, more resilient and fairer supply chain. Let us ensure that we do not let it go.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Carson. I am sure that you can write to those businesses.

16:11

Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP): I warmly welcome the motion, which is all about the Government providing big-picture thinking and local communities filling in the detail according to their individual needs and situations. That is exactly how it should be, and that is how we get community-led regeneration.

Like many of my colleagues, I made a point on Saturday of visiting a range of local businesses in and around my constituency to highlight small business Saturday. There is an incredible range of fantastic small businesses across Perthshire South and Kinross-shire. I could list them all, Presiding Officer, but I do not think that you would give me the time that I would need to do so. As we

all know, brevity is not my strong point at the best of times.

Small businesses are a vital part of our communities and they absolutely deserve our support, which has probably never been more needed than now, when the Covid-19 pandemic has had such a big impact, particularly on the retail and hospitality sectors. Online shopping and large chains might offer convenience, but the independent retailers that are on our doorsteps offer that and much more—individuality, craftsmanship and personal services are only some of the benefits that we can expect from shopping with good local businesses. A well-known butcher in Perth city centre—Beaton Lindsay from DG Lindsay and Son butchers—is one of those folk who is quite simply part of the community. He knows his customers by name and often knows what they want before they even say a word.

Boris Johnson once crowed that

“A pound spent in Croydon is of far more value to the country than a pound spent in Strathclyde.”

He was wrong, of course, as he always is, but let us rewrite that phrase. A pound spent in Crieff will do far more good for the local economy if it stays in Strathearn. We can swap Crieff for Kinross, Methven or Auchterarder—the principle remains the same. I am delighted that the minister mentioned our new local radio station, Radio Earn—I thank him very much for that. That principle is what is meant by phrases such as “circular economy” and “sustainable communities”, and that is exactly what Scotland Loves Local has to be all about: encouraging and enabling local people to spend their money on local businesses, giving those businesses access to the technology that will help them to compete with the corporate giants and creating environments that will increase footfall and activity, which will build local wealth.

When it comes to David versus Goliath, let us always try to get right behind David. The Scottish Government launched the £10 million multiyear Scotland Loves Local fund to support local people, businesses and community partnerships. This year, £2 million has been made available to support up to 100 organisations to bring new creative projects and activities to towns and neighbourhoods.

In my constituency, the fund will help to support the Murray fountain, which is an iconic Victorian landmark in James Square in Crieff, and it will help to launch and deliver the multichannel Christmas campaign across Perth and Kinross entitled “Perth is where Christmas is made”. The campaign includes a Perth city and surrounding towns gift guide and promotes the Scotland Loves Local gift

card, which supports, encourages and incentivises shopping locally.

The Scotland Loves Local agenda is not all about shopping; it is also about tackling inequality and promoting community-led regeneration. Reticent as I am to see any silver lining in the dark cloud of Covid, one thing that has come shining through and has been absolutely wonderful is the way in which communities in my constituency and across the country have come together to help those who need support, with people helping one another.

Finlay Carson: Does the member agree that a one-size-fits-all growth plan does not always address the issues in rural areas and that we should look for more Government support to go to local groups to deliver ambitions in the food and drink industry?

Jim Fairlie: I do not have a lot of time, but I will say only that the Government is doing exactly that. I do not know where Finlay Carson has been sitting.

Through the toughest part of lockdown, more than 7,500 food parcels were delivered by 16 community organisations around Perth and Kinross. Community groups such as Letham4All and Broke Not Broken in Kinross were always fantastic. Incidentally, I am delighted to see that the diggers have moved in this week to start the transformation of the Letham recreation centre into a new community hub that will be run for and by local people.

I said earlier that I was not going to start listing local businesses, but I will highlight one great wee company that deserves our support right now, and I refer Mr Lumsden to this. Michelle Maddox is the driving force behind Cloutie McToot, and I have known her for a very long time. When I ran events before I came into this place, if I was looking for great-quality local producers, Michelle Maddox’s name was always one of the first to be on my list. She began her business with a stall at a school fête and she moved on to farmers markets. She now has a shop in Abernethy and a mail-order business that sells traditional cloutie dumplings. I was absolutely disgusted to learn that she has been subjected to appalling levels of online abuse by ill-advised morons. Even if it is not parliamentary to use such words, Presiding Officer, I still think that we need to call out that moronic behaviour.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): I ask you to close now, please, Mr Fairlie. Thank you.

Jim Fairlie: Michelle Maddox was given that abuse for promoting her business—as I would have done if I were in her shoes—at a festive food and drink market in Downing Street. I would urge

all members to order their Christmas puddings from Cloutie McToot in solidarity, but I am pleased to say that we cannot, as Michelle Maddox's order book is full—although I understand that people can still pick up a Christmas gift or two from her shop in Abernethy.

16:17

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I welcome the debate. While it is framed by the Scotland Loves Local campaign, a positive initiative that I hope will increase activity in high streets and among independent retailers, it is also an opportunity to discuss the pressures facing retailers and to recognise their important role in supporting communities through the pandemic.

Scotland Loves Local is a promotional campaign, which is always important in retail, but it will not by itself change the trading environment for our high streets, which needs greater intervention and a recognition that the pandemic has had a significant impact on the viability of many retailers and high streets. However, the pandemic was a boost to the businesses of some larger retailers, particularly supermarkets, and our business taxation system should recognise that. Government investment for recovery must now be focused in a fair way that supports employment, skills and SMEs.

Vibrant local high streets can retain resources and wealth in their local communities. More than ever, we need to be supporting towns and providing resources to promote local high streets and businesses. When we are thinking of ways to support local high streets, we should recognise the importance of collaborative working. In my region, Burntisland and now Kinghorn both host five weeks or fortnights, which are popular and highlight independent businesses in the towns as part of the Totally Locally campaign. We had small business Saturday on Saturday, and I was spoilt for choice in Burntisland, but I went to Sunrize Bakehouse, a fairly new business that is thriving.

I have seen Burntisland High Street transform from a faded, tired high street into one that regularly features in national newspapers and on television. Why is it so successful? There are a few factors to consider. It has cheaper business rates than larger towns, and it has additional attractions in having a beach and a fair in the summer. We do not want to encourage car use, but Burntisland has ample and free parking, as well as a train station. It has grown as a town, with new housing developments. It has anchor shops, which draw in other business, and many of the businesses are run by people who have a strong commitment to the town. The traders work well together and they promote each other's

businesses. I hope that the town continues to grow and succeed.

The proposal for 20-minute neighbourhoods has some relevance in that regard. The minister has described national planning framework 4 as the driver for that, but the idea needs more substance, and it will also need investment. There is a vision, but it requires a number of policies and interventions that will work together to ensure that it can be delivered.

Kirkcaldy is just a few miles up the coast from Burntisland, but its fortunes are very different. It is facing challenges that are similar to those that face many high streets across Scotland. I recognise the businesses that are opening in the town and on the high street—many of them are independent retailers rather than large chains, and they are trying to change the offer on the high street.

I also recognise the role of Fife Council and the efforts that it is making to regenerate the town centre. However the failure of some large retailers, under significant pressure from the pandemic, online competition and the poor management and speculative practice of some owners, presents huge challenges. Large empty retail units—Kirkcaldy even has an empty shopping centre—require investment, imagination and incentives, and Government intervention that will break open the opaque ownership of buildings and support investment in local regeneration.

In evidence from the retail sector at the Economy and Fair Work Committee last week, we heard of the importance of business rates relief for the sector during lockdown and restrictions. Our amendment calls for a continuation of those policies using consequential spending, which will put Scottish retailers on a level playing field with retailers in the rest of the UK.

The Scottish Retail Consortium talked about broader cost pressures, rising energy costs, inflation and staff shortages. If we value high street retail, and if we recognise that there are broader benefits from it, there is a need for intervention. The Scottish Co-operative Party, of which I am a member, has launched its unlock the high street campaign. It is calling for ownership transparency and new routes for community co-operative ownership—an issue that Colin Smyth talked about—as well as consideration of how we reform taxation to ensure that small businesses are not disadvantaged by online sales.

The Scotland Loves Local gift card is good, but it lacks incentives, other than appealing to local businesses. It should at least have a financial top-up from Government. As other members have highlighted, Northern Ireland had a similar card; it had funds on it and people then spent the money

in their town centres, which was a kick-start for the retail and hospitality sector. Our amendment calls for a similar policy, and I hope that the Scottish Government will consider it.

16:22

Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests. I am a serving councillor on East Ayrshire Council, which is one of two council areas in my Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley constituency.

At the crest of the pandemic's first wave, councillors and officers in East Ayrshire recognised the real spirit that was being shown by our communities and local businesses. Working hand in glove with the local authority, everyone was collectively striving to keep folks safe and to ensure that we all had access to necessities.

Neighbours met for the first time, and new community resilience groups came together with the support of the council's vibrant communities team. Those newly forged and strengthened relationships are now vital in ensuring that we emerge from the pandemic in a way that promotes inclusive growth, local procurement and community wealth building, with a focus on community-led regeneration and sustainable 20-minute communities.

Back in May 2020, while I was still deputy leader of East Ayrshire Council, I was proud to support the council in its trailblazing endeavour to support the Kilmarnock and Cumnock business associations and the business communities across East Ayrshire by introducing the East Ayrshire gift card. The card has benefited retail by increasing footfall and boosting the local economy, helping businesses to adapt and respond to the pandemic. It works as a closed-loop credit card, and it is now accepted and sold in over 180 businesses throughout East Ayrshire. The card's flexibility, which allows it to be bought and spent in person or online, helped to keep local businesses trading throughout lockdown and enabled many traders to venture into online trading for the first time at no cost to themselves, bringing them to the attention of new customers throughout the area.

Although many of the businesses that registered were in the larger towns, the council worked to ensure that businesses in more rural areas of the authority were signed up to reduce the need for people to travel to spend the card. That embodies the concept of the 20-minute neighbourhood. The card can also be redeemed online, and the team worked to introduce the ShopAppy platform and help retailers to make the move to digital retailing.

Following on from East Ayrshire's UK-leading approach to locally sourced school food, in

December 2020 elected members identified an opportunity to help families who required support while also helping the business community, which had been impacted by the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns. East Ayrshire gift cards to the value of £20 were included in the locally procured food boxes that were distributed at Christmas to primary school children who received free school meals. That was on top of the much-needed £100 hardship payments from the Scottish Government. A total of 4,030 cards were distributed.

The gift cards gave families flexibility on how they managed their finances to best suit their own needs, and data revealed that they were used in a variety of ways, including to pay for Christmas dinners, butcher meat, baked goods, arts and craft activities, clothes and making vehicles road safe.

That was repeated at Easter 2021; the criteria were extended to include nursery children and the value on the card was increased to £50, which was funded by council budgets. A total of 4,520 gift cards were distributed. As the Christmas campaign data also showed, the majority of people used the cards responsibly and to the benefit of their family.

Using the gift card in that way takes away the stigma that is attached to families in food poverty, because nobody, including shopkeepers, knows whether they have received a gift card as a gift or as part of a care package. It also supports the shop local principle and feeds into the community wealth building agenda. The gift cards must be redeemed within East Ayrshire, which helps to retain the wealth locally. Sales of the gift card in its first year came to just more than £330,000. In addition to people purchasing the cards as gifts, businesses purchased them to gift them to their staff at Christmas or as incentives.

As was the minister, I was delighted to see East Ayrshire recognised with the judges' special award for its trailblazing work on the East Ayrshire gift card at the inaugural Scotland Loves Local awards last week—what an achievement. I send a special thanks to town centre regeneration officer Tracy Murray, a former boutique owner who spearheaded the creation of the card. Thanks to her drive and innovation, the Scottish Government and Scotland's Towns Partnership have taken her acorn of an idea and launched the Scotland Loves Local gift card nationwide. Colleagues, please keep your local gift card in mind this holiday season and support businesses at the heart of your communities.

16:26

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): Local issues are close to my heart.

During the first lockdown, I kick-started a mutual aid group in Moray, which was inspired by countless examples across Scotland of communities pulling together, taking initiative and providing support—by local people, for local people. Despite that groundswell in community activity, most people feel cut off from local decision making. The 2019 Scottish household survey found that only 18 per cent of Scots believe that they can influence decisions that impact on them and their local communities.

Despite the growing movement to buy local and support local businesses, supply chains and skilled workers are often not in place, particularly in remote, rural and island areas. A constituent in Inverness recently wrote to me after finding that no companies in a reasonable distance of his home provide internal wall insulation. Yesterday, members raised concerns in the chamber about the insufficient provision of local maternity care services in Moray, and I have spoken before about the centralisation of air traffic control removing skilled jobs from more remote areas of the Highlands and Islands.

To reverse that situation, we should start by strengthening local supply chains, and a healthy portion of public sector catering should be locally sourced to support local farming and food sectors. The good food nation bill should instruct public bodies to include a local food procurement target in their good food nation plans.

In the housing sector, we must invest multiyear funding in skills development, training and apprenticeships to expand and upskill the workforce to deliver green homes, particularly in remote and island communities, and we must encourage house builders to use wood that is grown sustainably in Scotland, to support our rural forestry sector.

We should support more remote businesses such as Foola Wool, which is using a grant from the island communities fund to shorten its supply chain. By creating its own renewable energy-powered spinning mill on the island, it will move jobs on to the island and increase its business resilience to climate and economic impacts.

To build a net zero nation, we need to start local and bring everyone with us. That is why the Scottish Government and Greens' shared policy programme promotes community wealth building and community-led regeneration.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: We all agree that active travel and saving rural bus services are vital, but our high streets need people to access them, particularly in our more remote and rural communities. Does the member agree that people who rely on a car, because they are older, are

isolated or live in remote communities, need parking on high streets to be able to access them?

Ariane Burgess: Absolutely. People who need to use cars should have them. In my town, we have good measures such as community parking spaces where such people can put their cars.

The wants and needs of communities are too often overruled under our current planning system when developers are given the go-ahead for projects that conflict with local plans that communities have worked hard to shape. Some communities are even compelled to dig into their own pockets to take such cases to court, such as the recent case of Carmunnock community council defending locally important green-belt land against a luxury homes development approved by Glasgow City Council. It should not be that difficult for communities to influence what happens in their local areas.

I will push for national planning framework 4 to include a presumption against development that departs from local development plans. Further, I will work with my colleagues in the Government to grant land assembly powers to public bodies, to enable them to deliver the development that communities, not profit-seeking developers, want.

16:31

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): I welcome and support the Scotland Loves Local campaign.

There are many reasons why we should all endeavour to purchase what we need from local businesses and support our local community projects. As never before, we have relied on our local businesses and communities to see us through the pandemic, especially during lockdown. Notably, we all encountered global supply issues. Most often, that was in respect of the supply of foodstuffs, many of which may be readily available locally.

Today, we all see the shortages in the supermarkets that are caused mainly by Brexit and compounded by Covid. By buying from local suppliers, we will encourage the expansion of local supply chains. That will create more resilience in the supply of our foodstuffs and reduce the pressure on longer and currently stretched supply chains. As local demand rises, so local production will expand. In turn, that will create more jobs and generate more local income, thus raising prosperity and creating sustainable new businesses and long-term economic growth.

One of the most obvious reasons for supporting our local businesses is to ensure that more money simply stays in the local economy. That helps everyone locally to become wealthier and makes

our local businesses more resilient. The result is smaller businesses that have the potential to expand and develop into bigger businesses that can cater for more people locally than they could before. It is important that we nurture that and invest to retain those services.

I do not expect each community to start building television sets or set up a motor car assembly plant. However, many products could be made locally and do not require expensive infrastructure or huge capital investment. Councils must play a key part in driving that approach forward by encouraging and supporting the construction of local supply chains. It will benefit them and us all.

I have seen at first hand in my constituency the way in which our communities pulled together in their resilience efforts during the pandemic, with their extraordinary work leaving a lasting impact on many people. I am sure that other MSPs have witnessed the same in theirs.

The Scotland Loves Local campaign not only recognises how much we rely on our local communities but helps them to continue that vital work through investment. I was pleased to see the investment that it put into supporting local community projects, businesses and social enterprises in my constituency.

For example, One Dalkeith recently received £20,000 as part of this year's £1.5 million funding boost from the Scotland Loves Local fund. That funding will benefit One Dalkeith to achieve its primary goal of connecting and supporting local businesses, including freelancers and home-based businesses, by providing a central networking hub in the heart of town.

The fund has also helped projects in my constituency to tackle one of the worst effects of the Covid-19 pandemic: isolation. Wellbeing Essentials in Roslin and Midlothian Cyrenians, located in the Midlothian community hospital in Bonnyrigg, both received £17,500. That is a great investment into deserving projects that provide safe outdoor spaces for people who need to escape from today's massive digital culture, find themselves unemployed or suffer from poor mental health. Having those resources readily available in our communities to give a helping hand when most needed is crucial. It is that point exactly—having the resources readily available—that we must bear in mind in a post-Brexit and post-pandemic Scotland.

I want to see our communities delivering the most sought-after services and I want to see those services remain within the community. In that way, we not only help our communities to prosper but create the ideal of the 20-minute neighbourhoods that we seek to achieve. We have learned from the pandemic that our surroundings can have a

huge impact on our health and wellbeing. It has also made us reflect on our community surroundings and the importance of the need to protect and preserve those surroundings.

By supporting Scotland Loves Local, we also support the need to protect our communities from climate change. By reducing the need for goods to be flown or trucked in from elsewhere, we are reducing their carbon footprint and contributing to a more sustainable future for jobs and our economy. That aspect should not be downplayed. A significant impact can be made if we buy local on a wide scale and every initiative to do so helps. We can all play our part in that.

I would ask that we all continue to think local, choose local and shop local. I very much look forward to seeing how the campaign grows with the future investment promised by the Scottish Government, fulfilling an ambition that we can all share.

16:36

Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con):

The pandemic hit our economy like a truck, and our world-class food and drink industry has taken a heavy hit, whether we are talking about producers, retailers or hospitality venues, so I will focus my remarks on them.

Ogilvy Spirits, in Glamis, produces Scotland's first potato vodka; Angus Soft Fruits Ltd works alongside UK and international growers to ensure a year-round supply chain; and Marks and Spencer said that it could not source better strawberries from anywhere in the world than it could from PJ Stirling of Arbroath.

I cannot mention Arbroath without recognising the famous Arbroath smokie, which is supplied by renowned local fishmongers such as Spink's and Swankie's. That other famous Angus delicacy, the Forfar bridie, is mainstay of many local high street bakeries.

I could go on, but the point is clear: Scotland has world-beating food and drink businesses that are worth protecting, and the Scottish Conservatives have a plan to do that.

We want food and drink firms to flourish on the high street, so we would relax planning laws and delay new regulations until 2023. The more people who visit hospitality venues, the more people there are to support retailers.

We would encourage consumers to buy more local produce from those retailers and we would ensure that public procurement always favoured Scottish produce—a Scotland-first approach.

For producers, we would launch a comprehensive farm-to-fork review of food policy

as a central part of our economic recovery. That would mean increasing producers' bargaining power—

Elena Whitham: Will the member take an intervention?

Maurice Golden: Yes.

Elena Whitham: Does the member understand that councils can already make the decision to procure locally? East Ayrshire already produces a huge amount of its food and other goods locally, so that can happen right now.

Maurice Golden: I think that most people recognise that the policy of making public procurement sustainable has been failing for a number of years. The Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014 did not deliver what it should have delivered. Too often, local suppliers are left out of public procurement, and that needs to change. It is a shame that Elena Whitham does not agree with that.

All those actions would help to strengthen our food systems. The pandemic has shown how resilient they are, but we cannot continue to rely on just-in-time supply chains.

In all, our plan could double the size of Scotland's food and drink sector by the end of the decade, and the British Government has already started that work. The UK budget provided £1.9 billion for Scottish farmers and guaranteed them extra funding for the next three years. The British Government also delivered a freeze in US tariffs on whisky, which was a huge win for our food and drink exports.

Establishing a network of Scottish trade hubs across the rest of the UK would deliver another boost.

Jim Fairlie: I am confused by the farm-to-fork ideals that Maurice Golden is spouting here, given that the UK Government is making trade deals with agri producers all over the world to bring cheaper products into Scotland.

Maurice Golden: I am not surprised by the member's confusion—his general demeanour is one of that ilk.

Let me be clear: action is needed. Shop vacancies are at a six-year high, and retailers speak of "insurmountable" challenges. More than a dozen industry bodies have written to the finance secretary for help. We hear that call, and we want to see a full year of 75 per cent rates relief. We forced the SNP to deliver rates relief last year, and we want food retailers and hospitality venues to be protected again.

Let us all buy, eat and promote local with every chance we get.

16:40

Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): I welcome the debate and the opportunity to pay tribute to all our local businesses, which have lived through an unimaginable 20 months.

Last weekend, on small business Saturday, I was pleased, like many other members, to pop into the excellent local businesses in the community in which I live. I am very glad to say that the Pad restaurant in Neilston has managed to keep going due to the support of local people who used its new takeaway service during lockdown and returned to the restaurant when it was safe to do so.

Despite being caught up in the many challenges of changing restrictions, including the ridiculous debate about the definition of a cafe, Lindsay and Linda, who run the Pad, told me how much they have valued the support of local people. Despite all the challenges, throughout the pandemic, along with many other local businesses, they have sought to give something back, including by preparing afternoon tea boxes for older people and those shielding. That is just one example of the many generous acts carried out by local small businesses in the pandemic. Many also offered free meals for key workers, discounts and preferential shopping times.

There is great resilience on our high streets and a sense of wanting to come together, but I worry sincerely about the ability of businesses to survive and thrive. It is clear that we owe them real and meaningful support in navigating what continues to be an extremely difficult set of circumstances.

We know that Scotland has lost almost 20,000 small businesses during a single year of the Covid crisis. Too many businesses have found it too difficult to remain open, and we have seen the hopes and dreams of many small and medium business owners completely shattered.

I am sure that members across the chamber will agree that our local businesses are at the heart of what keeps our communities full of life. This afternoon, we have heard excellent examples from around the chamber. Indeed, the minister and I hail from the same part of the world, and I have seen his tweets about his childhood memories of Friday nights with the Alpino chippy, a film from Foxbar video and a tub of Central cafe ice cream. I have similar memories, and I put on record for the first time in the chamber my endorsement of Central cafe ice cream—although possibly too much of it was consumed during lockdown. In all seriousness, I know that the minister understands the importance of those businesses to towns such as Barrhead. That is why it is vital that we do more and go further.

As colleagues have said, the principles of Scotland Loves Local are worthy and good. I declare an interest as a councillor in East Renfrewshire, because the council has benefited from many of those initiatives, which the minister has seen for himself. However, we need to go further and consider what else we can do. We should look at the voucher scheme and consider whether it would be better, as Colin Smyth and others have said, to adopt the Northern Irish approach and put spending power into people's pockets to use in our town centres. I hope that the minister—

Fiona Hyslop: Will the member take an intervention?

Paul O'Kane: Yes.

Fiona Hyslop: The member will have listened to Elena Whitham and heard about using the gift card in a targeted way for those who need financial help instead of taking a blanket approach such as the one that has been taken in Northern Ireland. Does the member welcome the pilot project involving the distribution of cards by Citizens Advice Scotland, which the minister mentioned in his opening speech?

The Presiding Officer: Briefly, Mr O'Kane.

Paul O'Kane: Of course, I welcome that—it is happening in our community in East Renfrewshire as well. However, the point that I am trying to make is that we need to listen to all those ideas and put money into everyone's pockets so that they can spend it in communities. That is vital if we are to encourage people to go into town centres and spend more money. I hope that the minister will listen to what we are suggesting, as we make the suggestion in a spirit of collaboration and, indeed, consensus.

We have mentioned having 50 per cent business rates. I think that that would give businesses the breathing room that they require to survive as we go into next year. Furthermore, as I mentioned, our proposal to give a £50 voucher to everyone aged 16 and over to spend in non-grocery businesses with physical premises in Scotland would give businesses the boost that they need to thrive. These are our communities. They are important to all of us and to our constituents, and we need to help businesses to be at the heart of them.

The Presiding Officer: Before I call Emma Roddick, who will be the last speaker in the open debate, I remind members that they should stay in the chamber for at least two speakers following them and that those who have taken any part in the debate should be in the chamber for the closing speeches.

16:45

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I was absolutely delighted to welcome funding for various parts of the Highlands and Islands, including more than £17,000 for projects in Orkney, £10,000 each for Nairn and Shetland, and £20,000 for Inverness and the surrounding area—the list goes on.

Extra funding to business improvement districts in Nairn, Kirkwall and Inverness could go a long way, as would more money for Shetland Food and Drink and Living Lerwick, which I am sure would use that to champion the—at the moment, criminally underappreciated—local produce, such as that offered by Island Larder, which I enjoy immensely when I visit the isles.

This is what good governance looks like: funding at a local level that has purpose, principles and policies to back it up. Investing in local places cannot stop at just giving funding for projects, so it is disappointing that the Tory amendment seeks to remove nods at the end of the Government motion to wider action such as safe spaces for walking, wheeling and cycling.

We are past the point of talking about those issues in isolation. If we want people to return to shopping on the high street, they must be accessible and nice places in which to spend time. If we are to tackle climate change, infrastructure for people, bikes and public transport must be front and centre. If we leave town centres as polluted unattractive spaces for cars to use as rat runs, there is nothing to encourage people off their sofas and the internet and on to pavements and into local shops.

I agree with the line in the Tories' amendment that things were not really working pre-pandemic. I just do not agree with the conclusion that they draw that the solution is to focus solely on throwing money at the issue without addressing the causes of low footfall. No amount of rates relief or eat out to help out-type vouchers will be enough to tide over high street businesses if nobody is coming through the doors. What we had before was not great. The pandemic, for all the bad that it has brought us and all that we have lost—

Douglas Lumsden: We were trying to say that there had been problems for a long time before the pandemic, so I agree with the member on that point. We have had an SNP Government for such a long period and it has not addressed the issue.

Emma Roddick: We have had an SNP Government for a long time. We have also had a UK Government for a long time that has refused to give the Scottish Government fiscal powers to make the change that the member is asking for.

Financial support for business is vital. As we have heard, the SNP Government is delivering that. That is despite on-going restrictions on the economic decisions that we can make without the permission of Westminster. However, our businesses should be thriving, not just relying on short-term funding or other financial support.

Pontification and demands made by the Opposition might make better headlines than the Scottish Government's approach, which takes into consideration transport, spaces, climate change, housing and many other policies that have an effect on the experience of business owners in this country, but those headlines will not help anyone but the Opposition.

The Government's rounded, thoughtful approach—

Paul O'Kane: Will the member give way?

Emma Roddick: Certainly.

The Presiding Officer: I call Paul O'Kane. I remind him—and Emma Roddick—that the member is in her last minute.

Paul O'Kane: The member mentions headlines. Does she accept that Northern Ireland's experience of its voucher scheme, which has been supported by chambers of commerce, is that it has worked exceptionally well?

Emma Roddick: I am sure that the member will not disagree with my point that that on its own is not good enough and that we have to consider the wider picture. That is what the motion does.

This week, I encouraged my constituents to respond to the consultation on national planning framework 4. I repeat that call today. Too often, we do not feed into local development plans or national frameworks. We wait until a planning application that we absolute hate comes in before saying, "Hold on a minute." That is too late. I ask people to get involved now, tell us what their priorities are and share their thoughts on how we create better places.

The Presiding Officer: We move to closing speeches.

16:49

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): It has been a real pleasure to listen to the speakers in the debate. It has certainly been an insightful experience. The common theme has been the sheer impact that the pandemic has had on the resilience of local high streets and small local businesses. As my colleague Paul O'Kane from West Scotland highlighted, 20,000 small businesses across Scotland shut up shop during the pandemic. The Federation of Small Businesses described that figure as "catastrophic",

and I think that we can all agree with that. The question now is how Parliament responds to the crisis in our midst.

A broad observation in today's debate has been of a big shift from local businesses to global multinationals, and we need to seriously address that trend. Although I commend the Government's motion, it does not go far enough to address the sheer scale of the problem that the country faces.

In many cases, our town centre businesses are the source of middle-class prosperity. They drive local employment, ensure accessibility and create a local economy and an ecosystem that truly benefit local wealth creation. Unfortunately, they are suffering, and Parliament needs to step up.

Extending 50 per cent rates relief would be a welcome immediate measure, and I urge the finance secretary to give it serious consideration in the budget tomorrow. However, we also need a fundamental review of business rates as an efficient tax system. Alternative options such as revenue profit sharing and land value taxation have to be seriously explored by this Parliament, and we need to give that issue full consideration. However, our primary focus must surely be on what we can do to maximise high street occupancy. Too much focus is often placed on how to maintain the value of property and rental rates, at the expense of occupancy. We have seen that approach blight our high streets for too long.

Claire Baker from Mid Scotland and Fife referred to Burntisland as a great high street model. Ariane Burgess from the Highlands and Islands region referred to how we can address the ownership of real estate in our country, which is a major issue. Expanding community and municipal ownership using existing models, such as the housing association model, and using that capacity to buy up more of our commercial real estate assets in town centres, could be a way of driving that wealth back into communities. Ownership of the assets allows us more custody and control over how they are utilised for the public good.

My colleague Colin Smyth from South Scotland mentioned the model of co-operative control that has been used in Dumfries, where expanding that model has realised meaningful and tangible benefits for the community. Surely we have to husband that model and try to expand and scale it up across the country.

Indeed, that is a trend that Scotland once was proud of. In Glasgow alone, there were once eight independent retail co-operative societies, with a quarter of a million members, and 50 or 60 years ago they accounted for 10 per cent of all retail spend. That model was swept away in the intervening decades, and we need to try to rebuild

it. Only two independent retail co-operative societies are left in Scotland: the Scottish Midland Co-Operative Society—Scotmid—and the Clydebank Co-operative Society. We can use them as a basis to rebuild that amazing infrastructure that captured wealth and kept it in the community, instead of being siphoned off to whoever knows where around the world by multinational chains. We need to look at that model in a serious way.

As we have heard from Douglas Lumsden from North East Scotland and others, the proper funding of local government is also essential to ensuring that high streets flourish. We have seen really good measures when it comes to the restoration and regeneration of local high streets, which colleagues from across the chamber have mentioned. Frankly, the majority of our high streets are not places where people want to spend their time. They are often bleak, treeless boulevards with austere, steel shutters on them after hours, and that creates a pretty bleak environment where people do not want to be.

By creating a more pleasant and pleasing environment for residents and visitors, we can attract consumers back to our high streets. Let us ditch the shuttered shop fronts, plastic signage and deserted pavements. We should be emphasising that our local high streets are open for business, welcoming and safe, but, sadly, it does not always feel like that is the case.

The heritage shop front improvement schemes in the city of Glasgow have provided a stand-out example of how to address that problem. Schemes are currently on the ground in Govan and Saracen Street in Possilpark, and I was delighted to assist securing funding for the latter project in 2018. Jackie Shearer, the managing partner of the Possilpark Business Improvement District, was last week named the winner of the Scotland Loves Local place leader award. It is a fantastic accolade that recognises what north Glasgow has achieved in the way of building a better urban environment. The focus of that scheme has been on kitting out new shop fronts on its once-traditional Victorian high street. In stripping back all that crud—the horrible plastic signage—amazing heritage features have been uncovered, such as stained glass and hand-painted signs from the Victorian era. That shows that, if we go back to the original idea of what a shop should look like, it becomes a much more attractive environment. People have been stunned by the results that have been achieved with relatively little investment.

We can do practical things at a small and large scale to provide such opportunities, but things such as the heritage shop front grant funding are threatened by local government cuts. There is

limited capital availability to continue with such grant schemes. Also, the planning powers do not stipulate that people who set up a new shop have to adhere to planning and design standards for the shop front, so we end up with cluttered and badly planned high streets, which contributes to blight and undesirability.

We need to look at how we can use NPF4 to drive better standards and we need to use good examples from Scotland. Along with a fair funding settlement for local government—Labour has been calling for that for a long time, and COSLA estimates that £1 billion is needed to properly fix local government in Scotland—we need to look at how we design our urban environments to ensure that NPF4 and other planning frameworks are resilient enough to ensure that best practice is captured and expanded nationally.

I welcome the Scotland Loves Local campaign, which has huge merit, but we know that it does not go far enough, given the scale of the damage that has been caused to our high streets, which has been outlined today, and the scale of the dilution of local ownership of businesses in Scotland, which has been ceded to multinational control.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

The Presiding Officer: Mr Sweeney will not take an intervention, because he is closing.

Paul Sweeney: I am right on the cusp of my limit. Sorry about that.

The Presiding Officer: You are beyond the cusp of your limit, Mr Sweeney.

Paul Sweeney: Sorry. I was pushing my luck.

The Presiding Officer: I would be grateful if you would resume your seat. Thank you.

Paul Sweeney: Okay. Thank you, Presiding Officer.

16:56

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): The Presiding Officer was throwing free minutes around earlier—there is a far more rigid approach now.

Never has the support and promotion of local businesses across Scotland been more essential. The pandemic and the associated restrictions that have been brought in on public health grounds have created untold worry and uncertainty for businesses of all sizes. Even those whose doors remained open throughout were impacted, as vital links in supply chains were pulled to breaking point and customer numbers reduced under the weight of travel restrictions. Staff were affected by illness

and self-isolation, which pushed operations across sectors to the brink.

It is positive that many businesses have weathered the storm so far, but we must not forget those that have not. That applies to almost 20,000 businesses in Scotland alone, according to the Federation of Small Businesses. Nor should we overlook the huge cost that has been incurred in making interventions in our economy. The business support payments and programmes to save jobs, such as the UK Government's hugely successful furlough scheme, meant that some of the worst potential outcomes were avoided, with billions of pounds of support in Scotland alone.

Most businesses are more fragile than they were previously. The drawing down of reserves and borrowing, as well as the human cost to individuals, has made our enterprises less resilient. What lies ahead remains to be seen, but there is certainly hope for the future and there are green shoots of recovery.

Tomorrow, the Scottish Government will outline its proposals for next year's budget. This is a crucial time. A positive response from the Scottish Government—one that creates the conditions for our economy to thrive and prosper—will I am sure be met with support from across the chamber. The Scottish Conservatives believe that support needs to continue, which is why we have called for changes to business rates to give a freeze on poundage and 75 per cent relief across a number of key sectors. More than ever, we need a budget that backs Scottish businesses.

With the local debate, there will be some cause for local reflection. As highlighted earlier, my region of the Highlands and Islands is not only large in geography but diverse in spirit. It is difficult to do its economy justice in just a few minutes, but I will say that one of the privileges of being a member of Parliament is the ability to see local businesses in action and to speak with the people who are building, creating and driving action in our local areas. In the Highlands and Islands, we have a disproportionate number of smaller businesses, and they are often more than just part of our economy; they are vital to the communities that they serve.

In our remote and rural communities, we see more directly the contribution that businesses make to employment, access to services and community life as a whole. They are what ties our communities together. However, there have certainly been challenges. In the Highlands and Islands, one of the major limitations is found in infrastructure. At a time when remote working and online retail have become so important, news that the R100—reaching 100 per cent—project, which involves the roll-out of broadband in my region, has been delayed from the end of this year to the

end of 2026 is concerning. So, too, is the apparent lack of certainty in the Scottish Government about the future of the dualling schemes for the A9 and A96, and the slow pace at which upgrades to those two choke points have taken place. In our island communities, we saw at first this year, and too often in previous years, how the disruption of vital lifeline ferry links harm local businesses and communities.

On a more positive note, the Scotland Loves Local awards, which today's motion mentions, played a positive part in highlighting great things that are happening in our local areas. One of the winners was Nairn, which scooped the climate town accolade. That is a well-deserved recognition of the work that has been undertaken by community groups across the town to show how more sustainable approaches to living can work in practice. It is fitting that the award comes to the Highlands and Islands region, which has been leading the charge in Scotland and in the UK as a whole in combating climate change.

Businesses, working with Government, academia and other sectors, have made great strides on renewable energy in the north of Scotland, particularly in my home of Orkney. There are great local projects in which materials are better utilised and recycled, building on our local heritage of reuse, working with the resources that are available and respecting the land and seas that surround us. That will increasingly be a part of doing business, and I am pleased that the Highlands and Islands region is leading the way.

However, the region faces the same challenges that are faced elsewhere. Many of those challenges have been touched on in the debate. More retail businesses have, for understandable reasons, moved online, and it will be essential to ensure that smaller local suppliers are not squeezed out. Our high streets and town centres will need to change—it will be a matter of more than just a lick of paint and more car parking. Consumer behaviour has shifted, and that shift has been accelerated by the pandemic. We value those hubs of community life, and it must be the priority of any Government to ensure that they have a future.

Sadly, support for small local businesses is not always universal. As has been mentioned, earlier this week, there were reports of one Scottish producer being targeted by people, out of a misplaced ideology, when promoting their goods in England. Such behaviour has sadly been all too common in Scotland in recent times. That should serve as a reminder that entrepreneurs put their heart and soul, as well as their livelihoods, into their enterprises, so I hope that all members will recognise the positive work of businesses and condemn the negative and hate-fuelled online

bigotry that can sometimes blight them. I think that I heard the minister do exactly that, and Jim Fairlie certainly did, which is very welcome.

There have been many excellent contributions today. My colleague Douglas Lumsden spoke about the impact of the past two years on business and the sensible support that can be offered, particularly to retail businesses. Few of us can have missed the empty units in our commercial areas, which he touched on. He also reflected on the role of local authorities. Sadly, the Government has curtailed not only their powers but the resources for councils to build positive economic conditions at a time when they are needed most.

Maurice Golden focused in more detail on the food and drink sector. He cited the issues that a number of businesses in his region face. There is a need for a comprehensive review of food policy, which is long overdue and has enormous potential benefits for Scottish producers. He also spoke about the importance of encouraging trade within the UK, so that we make the local truly national with the support of Scottish trade hubs.

Finlay Carson highlighted how local businesses increase services, often providing lifeline links to people who are unable to access shops. That happens across the country. I am sure that we all have plenty of examples in our own areas—I can certainly think of many in Orkney.

Local economies will not prosper simply through warm words. Tomorrow, we will see how far the Scottish Government's commitment to local business goes, and whether it is listening to and able to understand the concerns of those who are driving forward our economy. I hope that Scotland's businesses are not left disappointed.

17:03

The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights (Patrick Harvie): It has been one of those debates that has encouraged members to talk with great pride and enthusiasm—and rightly so—about the produce, businesses, communities and experiences in their local areas. Issues ranged from cloutie dumplings to Friday nights in Barrhead—I am not sure whether those were shared Friday nights; if not, it is not too late.

I encourage members to continue to tell the stories of their local communities with enthusiasm and to say what makes them diverse, creative and unique places. Whatever differences we might have in politics, I think that that unites us across the political spectrum and across all political parties. Colin Smyth was the first to paint that picture of his local area. His comment about football was the only one that I did not understand,

but that says more about me than it does about him.

Most of the debate has been characterised by positive ideas and positive assertions about the value of creativity and uniqueness in local communities, which I very much welcome.

It is almost a tradition in the Parliament that, in the days before the budget, Opposition amendments are about pre-empting it, but political parties understand that the Government will not be able to support amendments that pre-empt tomorrow's budget.

I welcome and encourage members to maintain the positivity that has been evident throughout most of the debate. If members have positive suggestions for how the Government should take its budget through, I am confident that they will come with proposals about where the money should come from as well as about where it should go.

The Scotland Loves Local programme is an example of an initiative that crosses numerous ministerial portfolios. As Tom Arthur said in his opening speech, the programme will succeed only through collaboration across political parties, ministerial portfolios and all parts of the Government, and through the public, private and third sectors working together with communities.

If we get that initiative right, the economic benefits will be evident. Encouraging more people to spend more of their time and money in local businesses will build stronger and more vibrant and sustainable communities, breathe life back into town and city centres and ensure that we are on the road to recovery following the disruption of the pandemic.

Members have put much emphasis on retail—including in the context of online retail—which is understandable. It is important to remember that many independent businesses with roots firmly in their local communities sell online, too. For some businesses, online sales help to keep them in business and keep their doors open on the high street. We need to encourage and support businesses to use those opportunities.

Paul Sweeney commented on the domination of multinationals, which is an important concern that many parts of the political spectrum share. It is clear that far too many opportunities for corporate tax avoidance exist for large multinationals, and tax avoidance is a big driver behind the domination of multinationals on the high street. Aspects of that issue are outwith the control of the Parliament. However, we want to look at devolved and local taxes, including with the citizens assembly on local government finance that will happen later in this session, which I encourage everyone to engage with.

The imminent national strategy for economic transformation will also offer opportunities to look at wider business ownership models and at the support that business owners need. Many ministerial portfolios are responsible for engaging in this agenda.

As the active travel minister, I understandably want to take some time to talk about how the way in which we move through our communities is profoundly connected to how we shape and connect to them, including to the businesses that operate in them. As Emma Roddick mentioned, the contribution that walking, wheeling and cycling can make to the Scotland Loves Local programme and the localism agenda more widely is extremely important, particularly the concept of 20-minute neighbourhoods.

I think that it was Colin Smyth who mentioned the role of public transport. I hope that he is happy to welcome the fact that we will see free bus travel for under-22s. I know that people are pushing for the expansion of that scheme to cover other groups, and I want to hear those arguments, but we are making a good start in making free bus travel available for under-22s. Ensuring that people can access their local communities affordably and sustainably is critical.

Walking, cycling and wheeling are parts of a public health approach, and we want to ensure that people get the benefits of an active lifestyle. However, they are about much more than that—they are about our connection to a local community. Fiona Hyslop talked about measuring success in broader ways than direct economic impact; active travel is about people and their connection to and relationships with one another and a place. Colin Beattie commented on how that point relates to the issues of isolation and mental health. The ways in which we are physically connected and move through our communities are important in shaping far more than narrow economic metrics.

People's travel behaviour and experience of the transport system differ depending on many factors such as income, gender, ethnicity, age and disability, among others. We need to understand those challenges as well.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: I think that the minister has forgotten geography, so I will ask him the question that I asked Ariane Burgess. How can we ensure that those who rely on cars because of their rurality can also access our town centres?

Patrick Harvie: They absolutely need to be able to, and I do not know anybody who wants to abolish the private car or make it impossible to use, but our culture is so dominated by the car that many people who do not have one have no access to the services and communities that they

need to access. A great deal of what we need to achieve in a more sustainable transport system is also about having a more socially just transport system.

As we have heard, 20-minute neighbourhoods are based on the idea of living in attractive, safe, and walkable places where people of all ages and abilities can access the services and facilities that they need daily within a walk or wheel of around 20 minutes. Claire Baker welcomed the concept, but she was right to say that we have a great deal more to do if we are going to turn that vision into reality. The Scottish Government is committed to doing that, and I hope that we will have many opportunities to engage constructively with Opposition parties to achieve it.

The spaces for people programme was established in the early phase of the Covid pandemic, in a quick response to the need to create safe walking and cycling spaces along with physical distancing. Many previously congested streets were transformed so that people could walk, wheel and cycle to explore their local area. We know that, when people move at walking, cycling and wheeling speeds through our communities, they are far more likely to stop, to pop into a shop or a cafe, to speak to their neighbours, and to make that direct physical connection at the human level with their local community.

Colin Smyth: Will the minister take an intervention?

Patrick Harvie: I will if I have time, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer: Very briefly, please.

Colin Smyth: Does the minister accept that one of the consequences of the spaces for people initiative was that it took money away from permanent active travel schemes and that most of the money was concentrated in two large cities? Investment in permanent schemes in other parts of Scotland lost out, and that needs to be addressed.

The Presiding Officer: In closing, please, minister.

Patrick Harvie: We learned—and still have to learn—a great deal from the spaces for people initiative about what worked well and what needs to be improved, but the Scottish Government is committed to an unprecedentedly massive increase in investment in walking, wheeling, and cycling. We need more than just infrastructure; we need the behaviour change and culture change that come with it. We need accessibility for bikes, and the free bike scheme for young people, which is already rolling out pilots across the country, is a big part of that.

I am sorry that I am not going to be able to cover everything that I had planned to cover in my closing speech. I will close by thanking, once again, all members who brought positive and constructive ideas to the debate. We all need to commit to working together on this agenda, because the Love Local campaign is about what happens in every community in this country, and, if we all commit to working on it, it will improve our country everywhere.

Business Motion

17:13

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-02464, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 14 December 2021

2.00 pm	Time for Reflection
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Topical Questions (if selected)
<i>followed by</i>	First Minister's Statement: COVID-19 Update
<i>followed by</i>	Ministerial Statement: Actions to increase access, choice and support through drugs services in Scotland
<i>followed by</i>	Ministerial Statement: Publication of Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels Statistics
<i>followed by</i>	Scottish Government Business
<i>followed by</i>	Committee Announcements
<i>followed by</i>	Business Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm	Decision Time
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business

Wednesday 15 December 2021

2.00 pm	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
2.00 pm	Portfolio Questions: Health and Social Care; Social Justice, Housing and Local Government
<i>followed by</i>	Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Business
<i>followed by</i>	Business Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Approval of SSIs (if required)
5.10 pm	Decision Time
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business

Thursday 16 December 2021

11.40 am	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
11.40 am	General Questions
12.00 pm	First Minister's Questions
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business
2.30 pm	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
2.30 pm	Portfolio Questions:

Constitution, External Affairs and Culture

followed by Standards, Procedures and Public
Appointments Committee Debate:
Shaping Parliamentary Procedures and
Practices for the Future

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 21 December 2021

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by First Minister's Statement: COVID-19
Update

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 22 December 2021

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
Justice and Veterans;
Finance and Economy;
Education and Skills

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 23 December 2021

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

12.45 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 13 December 2021, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted.—[George Adam]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:13

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of three Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motions S6M-02465 to S6M-02467, on the approval of Scottish statutory instruments.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Independent Reviewer (Modification of Functions) (Scotland) Regulations 2021 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Plant Health (EU Exit) (Scotland) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2021 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Redress for Survivors (Historical Child Abuse in Care) (Payments Materially Affected by Error) (Scotland) Regulations 2021 [draft] be approved.—[George Adam]

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

Decision Time

17:14

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Douglas Lumsden is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Colin Smyth will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S6M-02442.2, in the name of Douglas Lumsden, which seeks to amend motion S6M-02442, in the name of Tom Arthur, on Scotland Loves Local, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

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

17:14

Meeting suspended.

17:20

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We come to the division on amendment S6M-02442.2, in the name of Douglas Lumsden. 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)
 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)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (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)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (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)
 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)
 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)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 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)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 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)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Abstentions

McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-02442.2, in the name of Douglas Lumsden, is: For 28, Against 85, Abstentions 2.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-02442.1, in the name of Colin Smyth, which seeks to amend motion S6M-02442, in the name of Tom Arthur, on Scotland Loves Local, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is now closed.

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)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 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)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, 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)
 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)
 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)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (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)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central 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)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (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)

Abstentions

McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-02442.1, in the name of Colin Smyth, is: For 21, Against 93, Abstentions 2.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-02442, in the name of Tom Arthur, on Scotland Loves Local, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is now closed.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 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)
 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)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (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)
 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)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 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)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 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)

Against

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)
 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)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-02442, in the name of Tom Arthur, on Scotland Loves Local, is: For 87, Against 28, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament supports the ambition to love local and enable people to live well in their communities by encouraging people to think and choose local, supporting local businesses and jobs and building community wealth; commends the efforts of communities since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in working together to support each other and local businesses; congratulates the winners of the Scotland Loves Local awards announced in November 2021, and welcomes the Scottish Government's commitments on 20-minute neighbourhoods, the transformation of safe spaces for walking, wheeling and cycling, a just transition to net zero, an inclusive wellbeing economy, tackling inequality, and community-led regeneration.

The Presiding Officer: If no member objects, I propose to ask a single question on three Parliamentary Bureau motions.

The question is, that motions S6M-02465 to S6M-02467, in the name of George Adam, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Independent Reviewer (Modification of Functions) (Scotland) Regulations 2021 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Plant Health (EU Exit) (Scotland) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2021 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Redress for Survivors (Historical Child Abuse in Care) (Payments Materially Affected by Error) (Scotland) Regulations 2021 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

East Kilbride Rail Line Dualling

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): 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 final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-01675, in the name of Graham Simpson, on East Kilbride rail line dualling. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes the reported announcement by Transport Scotland that the single track part of the rail line between East Kilbride and Glasgow is not now going to be dualled as, it understands, had previously been promised, and that the money will be spent elsewhere; sees this as a missed opportunity to persuade more people to travel by train; notes the view that improving public transport connections is vital if Scotland is to achieve a shift away from cars, and further notes calls on the Scottish Government to reconsider what it believes to be this short-sighted move.

17:30

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): I thank all the members on all sides of the chamber who signed the motion that has enabled us to have this debate.

I start with a quote:

"the East Kilbride line is one of the areas that we have identified. I was there fairly recently, and the investigation works have started. The work involves not only electrifying the line but dualling it, which will provide it with much greater resilience and capacity to help to support the people who make use of the services. It also involves enhancements to East Kilbride railway station which, in my view, is unacceptable in its present form. That is why that work is one of the early actions that we intend to take forward."—[*Official Report, Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee*, 2 September 2020; c 34.]

Those were the words of the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity, Michael Matheson, when I questioned him at the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee in September last year. That is the same Michael Matheson who described the service to East Kilbride as "inadequate" and not "up to scratch". While posing in a hard hat on the line, he said:

"The combination of projects at East Kilbride and Hairmyres will transform the services into Glasgow in the next four to five years and is part of a major investment by us ... We want to make sure the line is able to cope with ever growing demand for rail services on this route and these are ambitious plans to take forward for the benefit of those who make regular use of the service on this line."

One would think that all was well—and it was, until October, when Transport Scotland sneaked out the announcement that we are not actually

going to get a dualled line between Busby and East Kilbride and that the line will be decarbonised, which may or may not mean electrified. The line from East Kilbride runs into Glasgow, through part of East Renfrewshire and then through the south side of the city. Going from East Kilbride, it is a single line until Busby, apart from a small loop at Hairmyres so that trains can pass each other. Only diesel trains operate on the line, and it is clear that, if we want to get to net zero, we need to tackle such lines.

We also need to encourage people on to the trains. One problem with a single-track line is that, if problems occur, as they do, the trains just stop. If they are coming from Glasgow, they usually go no further than Busby. That is why I, along with the former MSP for East Kilbride, Linda Fabiani, and others, have been pushing for years to get the line dualled and electrified. As members have heard, we got agreement for that, but it has now been torn up, with no consultation whatsoever.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): The member makes an important point about reliability and resilience. That lesson has surely been learned the hard way on the Borders railway, which was curtailed with significant sections of single-track line. That now presents a huge problem for the reliability of the line, with massive delays as a result of those single-track sections, which resulted from Transport Scotland's value engineering of the project.

Graham Simpson: Mr Sweeney is absolutely right—the Borders railway is in the same position.

The minister and I have spoken about the East Kilbride line, and I thank him for that. He will say that there is potential for the £40 million cost of dualling the line to spiral. However, there is such a risk with any infrastructure project, and it has to be factored in. It does not mean that the project should not be done.

Collette Stevenson, the new MSP for the town, has been quoted as saying that £100 million is still being invested in the East Kilbride corridor—I assume that she is referring to the entire line into Glasgow—which, in her view, is

“great news for the people of the town”.

It is great news for the town only if there is a guarantee of more trains; a guarantee that no hold-ups will be caused by there being only one line; and a guarantee of extra car parking at the new Hairmyres station rather than the reduced number of spaces that is now being mooted. I am afraid that none of that is being delivered right now, so it is not good news for the town at all, and it is not gesture politics to point that out.

East Kilbride is growing at a rate of knots; thousands of houses are being built on what was

green-belt land to the south-west of the town. We should be doing all that we can to encourage the people who live in those houses to use the train, so we should be increasing the capacity and frequency of services. We should not be taking a short-term view based on current usage, because it will bounce back. I see the minister shaking his head, but it is a short-term view.

At one time, the line continued from East Kilbride to Hamilton. When East Kilbride became a new town in 1948, the line beyond the town was closed, and in the mid-1950s, the dualled section from Busby became single track. Diesel replaced steam in the 1960s, and in 2000 the Hairmyres loop was built, which allowed for a half-hourly service.

Of course, we are not the only place to have a single-track line and diesel trains. The Borders line, as Paul Sweeney mentioned, is the same. The line from Perth to Inverness is single track, and so is the far north line. There will be others that members may wish to highlight. All those deserve investment, too—it should not be a case of divide and conquer. If we are serious about cutting carbon emissions from transport, we need to persuade people that they are better off not driving.

East Kilbride could be a great example of what can be done, and the ambition should not end at dualling and electrifying the existing line. Right now, if someone wants to get anywhere in Scotland from the country's biggest town—people from Paisley may disagree with that title—they have to go via Glasgow or drive. If we are to be truly radical, we should look to go beyond dualling only to East Kilbride. Why should we not extend the line again, maybe even to Hamilton at some point in the future?

I will end with the quote that I started with:

“The work involves not only electrifying the line but dualling it”.

That is a promise, and no amount of weasel words can wriggle out of it.

17:37

Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP): I have made it clear that I believe that electrification and dualling of the East Kilbride line would offer the best outcomes. I have been saying that all along to those who have been in touch with me regarding the issue, and I am happy to have that on the record. I welcome today's debate from Graham Simpson, and I look forward to hearing from other members as it progresses.

On 8 October, I was made aware of the Scottish Government's plans to electrify the East Kilbride

railway line. The press release on Transport Scotland's website stated:

"By progressing with single track this allows funds to be reallocated to other decarbonisation projects such as Borders electrification."

Other than confirmation that electrification was to take place, there was a lack of detail on what the improvements to station and passenger facilities along the two routes would be. I have had confirmation from the transport minister on what that work entails. It involves moving Hairmyres train station, and the creation of hundreds of parking spaces to accommodate future demands, where more can be added if required.

I welcome plans to encourage active travel and the commitment to electrification of the line, which will decarbonise our railway by 2035. However, I have heard from several constituents who feel that the town has been short changed, and that current plans to only enhance the single track do not go far enough to accommodate future demand.

Graham Simpson: Will the member take an intervention?

Collette Stevenson: No, thank you. I would like to continue.

We can all understand that the pandemic has hit revenue but, if uncertainty about future use of the line is cited as a reason for changing the plans, it surely makes more sense to dual it. As the transport minister will be aware, my position is that if we are upgrading the line now, it makes sense to dual it now, thereby avoiding additional costs and disruption, rather than do so years down the line.

Constituents have queried how much dualling would cost, so I would appreciate a steer on that. The Scottish Government suggests that the geotechnical conditions between Busby and Hairmyres are challenging and that double tracking would require significant earthworks to be undertaken, carrying a high degree of risk. We can assume that that is true of any project of that size. However, I would appreciate confirmation of what survey work has been carried out to date, with more details on the challenges that have so far been found.

Can the minister confirm whether current plans can accommodate four trains per hour outside the peak period with the enhanced loop? I have not been swayed that longer trains are the solution to ease pressure, and Network Rail has not been able to give a direct answer on that.

I have asked a number of questions on the matter, and I would appreciate an update in the new year as developments progress. Ultimately, the enhancements are good for the town, and the plans will ensure a more reliable and greener service, which I am sure will offer locals a real

alternative to using the car. I simply want the best for the people of East Kilbride, and I want the right decisions to be made to future proof the line.

17:41

Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con): I am contributing to the debate because a large section of the line that we are discussing runs through my Eastwood constituency. I thought that I was doing quite well, with eight stations in my constituency. I now discover, however, that Stuart McMillan has 22 stations in his constituency, although quantity does not mean quality. Nonetheless, I have eight stations in my constituency, and the line runs directly through it.

It is important to consider some of the positives. First, I am delighted that the electrification of the line is a fundamental part of decarbonisation, and that it will make a significant difference to that in the years ahead. Secondly, I am grateful that, in response to representations that I made—and I make this point despite Collette Stevenson's remarks just a moment ago—Network Rail increased capacity on the line from four carriages to six carriages during peak times. I know that constituents in Eastwood, as well as those in East Kilbride, I am sure, were happy to get a seat in the train, because many of them had found themselves standing during peak periods. The service that is on offer has definitely been enhanced.

However, the decision was made not to proceed with the dualling, from Busby, the last point of civilisation in Eastwood before one heads out towards Thorntonhall and East Kilbride. My constituency would quite happily annex Thorntonhall, were the residents there and the Boundary Commission for Scotland willing so to consider. Nonetheless, as we move through Thorntonhall to East Kilbride, we resort to a single track. I regret that, because all eight of those stations in Eastwood are historical; they were all there in the 1930s. They are all at what one would regard as one point at the north end of the constituency, not the south. Yet, the population, expansion and development of Eastwood and East Renfrewshire has massively been in a southwards direction, with virtually no public transport infrastructure at all. FirstBus has also been significantly reducing the bus services that are available there, so there is no option for many constituents, particularly those living in new housing developments, but to use their car.

I would have preferred and hoped for the dualling to continue, because I would very much like future consideration to be given to a spur from a dualled track to East Kilbride, which could swing round the back, towards the new developments in Maidenhill and up towards Whitelee wind farm,

which would afford public transport access to the whole of the south side of the expanding population in Newton Mearns and Maidenhill. We should be looking to provide additional people with access through public transport options; that would be a long-term and worthwhile project. It will be almost impossible to achieve, however, if we only have a single track on the line.

I can see the minister sitting there, shrinking in shame at this development, particularly as, only a fortnight ago, the United Kingdom Government announced a £10 million investment in the Whitelee wind farm, with carbon capture, allowing for some 250 bus journeys a day to be made between Glasgow and Edinburgh on a completely decarbonised basis. The UK is investing in the future of decarbonised transport, while the minister sits there and cuts the options.

The Minister for Transport (Graeme Dey):

The only people who should be shrinking with shame on the issue of rail investment are the Tories, given what is happening south of the border. While the Scottish Government is investing heavily in rail and rail infrastructure, the United Kingdom Government is imposing swingeing cuts on rail.

Jackson Carlaw: As the minister knows, the UK Government would be only too delighted to assist in transport projects in Scotland, if only Scottish Government ministers would get off their high horses and sit down to have those conversations.

Nonetheless, I think it important that the commitments that were given are honoured to make any future additional rail transport options feasible. I know that many of the improvements that have been made are positive, but this decision is a retrograde step that, given long-term population expansion, people—and, indeed, the Government—will come to regret.

17:45

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): I thank Graham Simpson for bringing this debate to the chamber.

Upgrading the East Kilbride line has been a long-standing objective of campaigners through the decades. As we have just heard from Jackson Carlaw, the line serves growing populations across the south side of Glasgow, East Renfrewshire and East Kilbride. However, although those communities have changed dramatically over the years, the railway itself has not, and passengers have raised with me their frustrations with an increasingly dated railway. For example, I have met commuters on Thornliebank station platform and heard at first hand their concerns about the frequency of services,

breakdowns and, at that time, excessive overcrowding.

The adoption of Network Rail's electrification enhancement proposals was set to be a game changer, with sections of double track or loops between Hairmyres and Busby stations facilitating more trains to East Kilbride. The decision to take forward those enhancements was welcomed by the community served by the line; it was the flagship of the Government's rail decarbonisation plan; and the Transport Scotland and Scotland's Railway websites were peppered with references to double tracking on the East Kilbride line to facilitate a more frequent service and more double tracking at the single-line section between East Kilbride and Busby.

Make no mistake—the working assumption of the Scottish Government and its partners on the ground was that the electrification of the East Kilbride line included dual tracking after Busby. Moreover, the assumed dual track would have made it possible to improve the frequency of services to four trains per hour not just at peak times but beyond that. It is astounding that Scotland's largest city and Scotland's second-largest town are still connected by a two-train-per-hour service for so much of the day. The failure to improve rail links between two of our largest settlements represents a failure to improve rail links for my constituents in East Renfrewshire and everyone else in between.

The project would also alleviate pressure on Glasgow Central station by reducing platform occupancy times, which would bring benefits to the whole city region. The customer outcomes from upgrading the line as set out by Network Rail include greater punctuality, quicker journeys, more seating capacity and, crucially, more trains.

However, the Scottish Government has now chosen not to implement Network Rail's proposals in full and, by its own admission, is limiting the network's capacity to provide more trains on cost grounds. There is nothing too impossible, nothing too difficult or, indeed, nothing unaffordable about double tracking the East Kilbride line, and the Scottish Government is choosing to divert funds elsewhere rather than future proof the line. Such short-term financial decisions are to the long-term detriment of the suburban rail network, and the move will not deliver modal shift but further entrench car dependency.

The Scottish National Party has to come clean: it has no plan to build back services to pre-pandemic levels, never mind improve them. That is why it will not disown the discredited Docherty report and why it is raiding the budget for the East Kilbride line. The Tory Government's decision to scrap the eastern leg of high-speed rail 2 was met

with opposition across the north of England. In the words of Andy Burnham, levelling up

“means bringing forward your best solution, not a cut price solution.”

However, that is precisely what the SNP transport minister is doing in the west of Scotland. This is a cut-price solution, not the best solution, for our communities, and it is a betrayal of the passengers who have endured overcrowded and inadequate services for years and the local economies that are counting on rail improvements to boost their recovery.

My constituents in East Renfrewshire, where the line is already dualled, need double tracking after Busby just as much as the people of East Kilbride or Glasgow, because it is only by extending the double track that we can secure for the future the full benefits of Network Rail’s original proposals. Those proposals would mean more trains that would be quieter, quicker, greener and more frequent and could meet the aspirations of the passengers whom I met in Thornliebank and many more like them in Busby, Clarkston, Giffnock and all along the line.

The Parliament should stand united in telling the Scottish Government to get dualling back on track, and that is why Labour is calling on the SNP-Green Government today to reverse the decision to drop dual tracking and to upgrade the East Kilbride line in full.

17:50

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): I thank Graham Simpson for bringing the issue of East Kilbride rail line dualling to the Parliament for debate. As has been mentioned, given that the East Kilbride line travels through East Renfrewshire, it is obviously of significant interest to those of us who represent the area as constituency or regional MSPs.

Ensuring that public transport infrastructure is fit for the 21st century is key to encouraging modal shift and getting people to move away from cars to meet the Scottish Government’s targets to reduce car kilometres by 20 per cent, to cut our carbon emissions and to ensure greater access for those who do not have access to a car.

Given my interest in the sections of the track that run through East Renfrewshire, I highlight that, in debates on improving the line, comments are sometimes made about the comparatively high levels of car ownership in areas such as East Renfrewshire, which are relatively prosperous. However, 15 per cent of children in that community live in poverty. That is hundreds of families. When assumptions are made about areas with high levels of car ownership, those assumptions are to the significant disadvantage of

the families that are left behind, which are further marginalised.

I have campaigned for improvements on the line for a while. In fact, two years ago, I secured an additional £5 million fund for improvements to the Milngavie and East Kilbride lines. Unfortunately for East Kilbride, that fund was, in the end, used entirely for a specific £5.5 million upgrade project on the Milngavie line. That was entirely justifiable, given that that has consistently been the worst-performing rail line in Scotland; in fact, before the pandemic, it regularly saw fewer than one in four trains arrive at Milngavie station on time. However, both lines share the need for much more substantial infrastructure improvement. They both require dualling if they are to have the frequency of service that we need to drive modal shift and the level of reliability that is required to make them a viable and attractive alternative to cars.

As was noted, single-track lines or single-track sections of lines across the country have consistently presented obstacles to wider capacity and performance improvements. Some of those are historical legacies from a century or more ago, and many are the result of a deeply misguided programme in the late 1980s and early 1990s whereby twin-track lines had one track removed for financial reasons. Some are the result of more recent decisions that have, I believe, again been made on a financial basis.

I welcome the £100 million-worth of improvements that have been and are being delivered on the line, including improvements to make Giffnock station more accessible to my constituents. That is a necessary step towards decarbonising Scotland’s transport infrastructure. As transport is the one area in which emissions have consistently risen, electrification of the rail network is essential if we are to meet our emission reduction targets.

That is why it is disappointing to hear that the long-proposed dualling between Busby and East Kilbride will now not proceed, despite past commitments. I know that that view is shared by my Green colleague for Central Scotland, Gillian Mackay. She wrote to the minister to highlight her dismay at those reports. She rightly noted that protecting and improving services is key to restoring confidence in public transport as we come out of the pandemic, and she noted that regions across Scotland should not need to compete for funding for essential upgrades. Apparently, the money for dualling the line had been reallocated to electrification of lines elsewhere.

In response to Gillian Mackay’s letter, the minister said that one of the reasons for scrapping the dualling is the level of anticipated demand after Covid. I find that to be a troubling rationale,

because it suggests that Government policy making should be led by external forces rather than used as a tool to proactively drive up the use of public transport. If the justification for reduced capacity is that fewer passengers are returning to the railways, that outcome is being guaranteed by providing them with inadequate capacity to return to and failing to deliver the improvements that have long been needed. That is precisely why the co-operation agreement between the Greens and the Scottish Government includes £5 billion of investment in our railways across this parliamentary session.

We should be making it easier, not harder, to use public transport, as we are doing for buses, with our free travel scheme for under-22s, and we should be investing the money that is needed to meet the scale of the challenge that we face in cutting our transport emissions. Scotland needs to deliver a more effective and more attractive transport network that draws more people on to our railways, and there is no reason to leave East Kilbride behind in that agenda.

17:54

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): Greater Glasgow has the second-largest urban railway network in the United Kingdom, but it is fair to say that it is less than the sum of its parts. If we are to invest in it seriously, we must commit to a vision of a 15-minute service in all parts of the city. Shifting to that turn-up-and-go frequency would unlock true modal shift and move people on to the railways.

I do not know how many members frequently travel by rail. When I wake up in the morning and try to figure out whether I will miss my connection from the subway to the railway service by one minute, which would mean waiting half an hour for the next train, that is a significant deterrent to deciding to take the train rather than the car, particularly if I have to get to an appointment under time pressure.

Glaswegians make such decisions and calculations every day of every week. Because services in our transport system across the greater Glasgow region are so infrequent, the system is not up to metro-level standard, which is why it is not being fully utilised and why we are not reaping the full benefits of the great legacy of infrastructure that was built in the 19th and 20th centuries, even despite the 1960s Beeching cuts.

We need to look seriously at how to build the commitment. The strategic transport projects review that is coming up will look at the idea of a Glasgow metro. Surely a key and critical component of such a metro is connecting East Kilbride—the sixth-largest settlement in Scotland, which is in the greater Glasgow region—to the

urban centre of the city region, which is Glasgow city centre, in a way that means that people do not have to look at their watches but can turn up at the station and see a train arriving within 15 minutes to take them to where they need to go.

Graeme Dey: I recognise the member's argument, which is why the proposal for a Clyde metro system takes account of the several local authorities that are involved. Does he accept that rail is only one component and that there will be other components to achieve what he looks for? I am not speaking specifically about East Kilbride, but there might be light rail or enhanced Glider-type bus services. A metro scheme will take in a raft of transport modes.

Paul Sweeney: I recognise that. For example, there is a proposal to convert the Cathcart circle to light rail, which would unlock capacity at Glasgow Central station. East Kilbride could be a candidate in the future for light rail conversion, which could increase frequencies and fully unlock the line's potential. However, we would still need the reliability of dual tracking to do that—even tramways need dual track. Even if the system used light-rail rather than heavy-rail vehicles, the same principle would apply—we need dual tracking to provide the through ways and the reliable service.

It is one thing to model on a computer a frequency of four trains per hour, but we know from the bitter experience of the Borders railway that, in reality, the service is not as reliable as that. As Ross Greer showed in relation to Milngavie, we have a similar constraint on that part of greater Glasgow's network.

We need the commitment to dual tracking. The risk is not just about the earthworks required in building a dual-track system; it is about the service's lack of reliability. That will deter people from choosing to take the train when they are hard pressed at 8 o'clock in the morning and thinking about whether they will get to work on time if they miss their connection by two minutes. They would then have to stand at a platform, possibly in winter, for half an hour to wait for the next train, rather than getting a train within seven or eight minutes, as people would in London. At any point in the day across London, it is par for the course to turn up and get a service within a few minutes.

We need such ambition for Scotland's largest city if we are to unleash the economic potential of the greater Glasgow region. A measly attempt is being made to quietly downgrade the East Kilbride line proposal after the great bombastic statements from the then Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity about how it was not up to scratch and dual tracking was needed. That is being done surreptitiously, without true scrutiny and without any clear publication of the

justification. Given how difficult it is to get railway upgrades done and to get business cases approved, to quietly downgrade a proposal seems like a double standard.

We need to apply the same level of scrutiny to the justification of the downgrade; the case has not been presented. I ask the minister to please have more ambition for greater Glasgow. This is a one-way bet—let us dual track the East Kilbride line and unlock the greater Glasgow region's potential.

17:58

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests, and I thank Graham Simpson for raising this important debate.

Here is a simple test: is the Government prepared to improve the everyday lives of the people of Scotland to a level that matches its COP26 summit rhetoric? Is it prepared to speak through its actions, not just with its words? Or with the banners now folded, the flags taken down and the sounds of protest which filled the streets of Glasgow now fading, is the Scottish Government going to make the climate catastrophe not better but worse?

We were told at the weekend by the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy that tomorrow's budget will be

"a stepping stone towards a fairer, greener Scotland".

She did not leave it there. She went on:

"That is our social, economic and environmental imperative."

So, the question that the Parliament is asking of the Government is this: where is that imperative when the transport minister is happy to slash Scotland's rail services across the board by 10 per cent? Where is that imperative when the planned double tracking on the line between Busby and East Kilbride, which is at the centre of Transport Scotland's decarbonisation action plan, faces cancellation?

At the very point when we need ambition, we are given managed mediocrity. At the very point when we need vision, long-term thinking and investment in public transport, the people are offered short-sighted cuts and Government indifference.

I read with interest the transport minister's recent interview in *Holyrood* magazine. I say to him that he cannot tell us that he has seen the light about rail transport in Scotland and then close his eyes to it in South Lanarkshire. He cannot tell us one week that

"We should be very clear rail is devolved; it is for us to decide what Scotland's railway will do",

and tell us the next week that it is somehow out of his hands. So, I say to him that we need the same toughness to resist these cuts and to boldly invest in the railway as we see in the fight over where decision-making power lies in the railway.

This is about how we organise the future, but it is also about what future we want to organise. Earlier this week, I read an open letter to MSPs from Kevin Lindsay of the train drivers' union ASLEF in which he calls for action in tomorrow's budget to reduce passenger fares, invest in freight and reject the proposed cuts to services. He is right.

In recent weeks, we have seen a report, supported by all four rail unions—the RMT, the TSSA, Unite and ASLEF—in which they argue for the expansion of Scotland's railways, not their contraction, and call for the transport minister to reject the Docherty proposals and the Abellio plans to axe 300 trains a day. The unions' clear demand, and my unflinching message to the minister and to the Government—including to its Scottish Green party members—is this: reinstate the dualling of the East Kilbride line; drop the plans to axe ticket offices; and ditch the proposals to cut jobs and to undermine workers' terms and conditions. Once and for all, do the right thing and reverse these cuts—your cuts—to Scotland's railways.

Ross Greer: On a point of order, Presiding Officer, it was remiss of me not to refer members earlier to my entry in the register of members' interests. Earlier this year, I received a financial donation from a rail union, the RMT.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Greer; that is now on the record.

18:03

The Minister for Transport (Graeme Dey): I genuinely welcome the opportunity to respond to this debate on the East Kilbride rail project, not least because it provides an opportunity to clear up one or two misunderstandings.

I am sure that, like thousands of rail passengers along the East Kilbride to Glasgow rail corridor, Parliament welcomes the commitment to the full electrification of the East Kilbride line—we have heard members welcoming that. I hope that that clears up Graham Simpson's question about full electrification.

This exciting project will not only further our ambitious plans to decarbonise Scotland's railways by 2035 but deliver a sustainable travel option for rail passengers from East Kilbride and its surrounding communities—one that will use

cleaner, greener trains and meet anticipated demand well into the foreseeable future.

We all recognise the need for wider decisive action to meet the challenges of the climate emergency. The substantial overall investment in the East Kilbride line that we have announced, which will rise to at least £120 million, will deliver not only electrified services but significantly enhanced station and interchange options for the travelling public. Those will make rail services more attractive and accessible and will encourage a modal shift from the polluting car to a fully decarbonised rail corridor.

I will address the issue of dualling. I agree that dualling was talked about, but it was never a specific requirement for the route. What was required was a project that would meet peak passenger capacity into the foreseeable future in a decarbonised way.

Dualling was certainly an option that was considered in the business case development process, but the cost was prohibitive and it simply did not offer value for money or represent the best use of scarce public finance resources, when it was possible to meet expected demand with the approach that is being taken.

I want to make this clear: there is a bit of a myth that Network Rail's proposal was vetoed by Transport Scotland. However, the proposal that came to Transport Scotland for approval was a joint proposal from Network Rail and ScotRail, based on the evidence that they had before them.

Jackson Carlaw: My question is a simple one, although I do not know whether the minister will be able to answer it. Can he define what he means by "the foreseeable future"?

Graeme Dey: I will come on to talk about the modelling that is done. We know that passenger usage has shrunk during the pandemic and that it will return to some extent—and maybe to a greater extent. What will be delivered on the line will encourage further usage. The modelling takes account of growth; indeed, that was the whole point of it.

The plans that we have announced, together with the significant benefits that will be delivered, will cost less than dualling would have cost, will deliver value for money and will deliver for passengers and the environment. I respect Richard Leonard's demands for all sorts of investment in rail, but if he is going to call for more services, more stations, investment in infrastructure and reduced fares, he also has a duty to say where that money is going to come from. I am afraid to say that it is so typical of the Labour Party not to do so in the chamber.

Graham Simpson: I am listening very carefully to what the minister is saying. Does he not accept that dualling the East Kilbride line was not just an idea, but a promise that was made by Michael Matheson? If it does not happen, how do we get the resilience that we do not have right now, with trains sometimes stopping at Busby? How do we get more trains if the line is not dualled? How can that be achieved?

Graeme Dey: I will respond to that in a moment, but I want first to explain the process that has been and is being undertaken across Scotland's railways just now.

We have identified projects—in order—that will be part of the decarbonisation agenda. Ground work is then carried out—indeed, that is currently happening on the Dunblane to Aberdeen stretch—to give us a better understanding of what lies underneath and to the sides of our railways. With the elderly rail network that we have in Scotland, we have no record of what it was built on. As the Borders railway project unfolded, for example, more and more mine workings were discovered. Inevitably, there will be outcomes for delivery that might well be at odds with what had been anticipated, but we still have to ensure that we deliver outcomes such as passenger capacity that everybody is looking for. That is what we are setting out to do.

Right now, peak time demand on the East Kilbride route remains lower than the ScotRail national average at only 34 per cent of pre-pandemic levels. Of course passengers will return—that is what we want and what we want to encourage—and the joint industry passenger modelling for the route and analysis of changing travel patterns across Scotland give us confidence that the capacity that will be provided by the cleaner, greener trains, which we expect to roll into service from late 2024, will be more than sufficient to meet both current and forecast peak demand. For one thing, the carriages on electric trains are significantly bigger than current rolling stock.

I will address Graham Simpson's question about resilience. He will know from our previous conversations that, in addition to the single-tracking issue, we are working through potential enhancements to signalling, which is one of the issues with Busby, and further track infrastructure in the form of loops. That will allow us to address the points that Mr Simpson rightly makes. That development work is on-going and I expect Network Rail to report back before the next stage of the business case process early next year. Given the genuine interest and concern that have been expressed tonight, I am happy to commit to arrange a briefing for all interested MSPs at that point, so that they will have the opportunity to

interrogate the detail of the overall package in the final proposal.

I would argue that our significant investment in this critical route demonstrates our continuing commitment to decarbonising Scotland's railway. East Kilbride is only a part of the proposals. We are already targeting Barrhead; work on the Borders railway is coming up; and the Fife circle is next on the agenda. Indeed, the Levenmouth rail connection is being developed with electrification in place. Moreover, as we speak, teams are out doing ground-work assessment on the rail link from Dunblane to Aberdeen, and I am pleased to say that, according to the last report that I received, no issues had been identified.

It takes time to plan these major infrastructure projects, and it is important that we do the preparatory work to ensure that we do not meet any problems when we carry out the work on the ground. Picking up on an earlier question, I point out that, in addition to the costs that we knew about with dualling, the risk assessment that was carried out due to the nature of the work highlighted a stretch of the line that would have involved the removal of roughly 14m of earth and various other things—and, of course, once that material is taken out, it has to be disposed of. However, the question is what we find at that point, and the risk assessment gave us a degree of concern in that respect.

I go back to my earlier point about the outcome, which is to deliver capacity on a clean, green line, and that is what we intend to do. As I have said, I am more than happy to invite all interested MSPs to a briefing early in the new year and give them the opportunity to ask any questions that they might have and to interrogate the final proposals.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate.

Meeting closed at 18:11.

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