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AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament (Hybrid)

Wednesday 2 February 2022

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# Scottish Parliament

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[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):** Good afternoon. I remind members of the Covid-related measures that are in place and that face coverings should be worn when moving around the chamber and the Holyrood campus.

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

#### Covid-19 Recovery (West Scotland)

1. **Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government how its policies across Government will support people living in the West Scotland region to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic. (S6O-00692)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):** The Covid recovery strategy sets out an ambitious plan for Scotland's recovery that is focused on creating a fairer future, particularly for people who have been most affected during the pandemic. Our plan for recovery includes supporting the recovery of our public services to ensure that they meet the needs of people across Scotland. For example, our national health service recovery plan is backed by over £1 billion of investment.

We are also focusing on creating good green jobs and fair work to support our recovery. Regional economic partnerships are central to achieving that. The West Scotland region benefits from a range of regional economic partnerships and deals, including the Glasgow city region deal, the Ayrshire growth deal and the Argyll and Bute rural growth deal. Those will see transformational investment in projects to support long-term, sustainable and inclusive growth as we recover from the pandemic.

**Katy Clark:** As the cabinet secretary knows, the west of Scotland has some of the worst poverty and deprivation in Scotland and the United Kingdom. The pandemic has taken away hope and opportunities, particularly for young people.

What can the Scottish Government do to bring high-quality apprenticeships, particularly to those in some of the most-deprived areas?

**John Swinney:** I agree with the analysis and focus of the Covid recovery plan that Katy Clark has put forward. At the heart of the Covid recovery strategy is the tackling of endemic poverty, particularly child poverty. During the pandemic, those issues became worse, and the people who were suffering prior to the pandemic suffered more during it. Therefore, they must be the focus of our attention after the pandemic.

I assure Katy Clark that the heart of our strategy is about supporting young people to achieve good outcomes. One of the best outcomes that they can achieve is an apprenticeship, so we are supporting a range of different companies and organisations, and we are working through Skills Development Scotland, to ensure that apprenticeships are available in all localities in Scotland, particularly in areas of deprivation.

I recognise that some young people who have experienced poverty might require additional support to gain access to some of those opportunities. Support will be available through ventures such as MCR Pathways, on mentoring, and others that can support young people to achieve their potential.

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** This morning, I was delighted to attend the official opening in Largs of a new 122-home council housing development, which is backed by a £7.3 million grant from the Scottish Government. Does the cabinet secretary agree that constructing new council housing helps to drive economic recovery in the west of Scotland and that the £68 million that was granted to North Ayrshire Council over the past five years alone, with more than £81 million to be granted over the next five years, is in sharp contrast to the sum of precisely zero that was provided by the Labour-Liberal Democrat Executive during its entire eight years in office?

**John Swinney:** I agree with Kenneth Gibson that the construction of affordable housing in the local authority sector is an essential part of our approach to recovery. Since 2007, the Government has demonstrated a commitment to that agenda, with more than 105,000 affordable homes having been delivered in that period, of which more than 73,000 were for social rent and nearly 17,000 were council homes.

The Government is committed to delivering 110,000 affordable homes by 2032, of which 70 per cent will be available for social rent and 10 per cent will be in our remote rural and island communities. Those commitments are part of an ambitious investment package of around £18 billion that will create 15,000 jobs each year, some

of which will be in the sectors that Katy Clark has just asked me about.

**Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con):** Many small and medium-sized enterprises in the West Scotland region are experiencing severe skills shortages, which is partly due to a lack of capacity to oversee and fund training and apprenticeships. The Scottish Government claims success on its reskilling initiatives, yet the number of modern apprenticeships in East Dunbartonshire and West Dunbartonshire dropped by almost half from 2019-20 to 2020-21. Why has the Government decided to cut college funding at a time when reskilling is so important to the recovery from the pandemic?

**John Swinney:** First of all, I think that it would be helpful if I put on the record that the number of modern apprenticeships fell in the years that Pam Gosal mentioned because of the pandemic and the fact that the country was in lockdown. It was very difficult to enable those opportunities to be taken up in that context.

Of course, over the preceding four years, we had seen steady, incremental growth in modern apprenticeship numbers. The Government would have achieved the target of 30,000 modern apprenticeships for the financial year 2020-21 had it not been for the pandemic. We had reached more than 29,000 apprenticeships in the previous year.

That explains the situation. However, the Government is committed to sustained investment in the sector because—Pam Gosal's point to me is a fair one—SMEs need access to a reliable stream of new entrants, with appropriate skills, and that is very much the focus of the apprenticeship programme. We are taking that forward with Skills Development Scotland and the college sector, which do superb work in making sure that every young person is able to fulfil their potential. That is our objective.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 2 has been withdrawn.

### **Covid-19 Strategic Framework (Consultation with COSLA and Local Authorities)**

3. **Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what consultation it will undertake with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and individual local authorities on the Covid-19 strategic framework that is currently being developed. (S6O-00694)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):** The strategic framework is the means by which we set out our overall approach to the Covid-19 response. It explains what we are doing and why.

The update that the First Minister announced in Parliament will be published in the coming weeks. That first update will set out the detail of our approach to managing the virus in the medium to long term, as the virus starts to exist at more manageable and consistent levels.

We will engage with COSLA, the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers and individual local authorities on the development of the strategic framework in advance of its publication to Parliament.

**Paul McLennan:** The cabinet secretary will know that local authorities have played and will continue to play a vital part in our recovery from the pandemic. How often will the guidance be formally reviewed, and what will the process be for doing so?

**John Swinney:** I will make two points in response to that question. First, we have worked very closely with local authorities on the formulation of the Covid recovery strategy. Essentially, the strategy has been developed between the Government and local authorities. A programme board, which I co-chair with the president of COSLA, monitors the progress on the plan. I hope that that reassures Mr McLennan and Parliament that the Government is working closely with local authorities in that regard.

Secondly, in the strategic framework, we hope to achieve a document that lasts for a sustained period. We hope to be moving into a period in which the handling of the Covid pandemic is more consistent, so the document will require limited revision. Obviously, however, we will have to keep that point under review, and it will be the subject of updates to Parliament.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 4 has not been lodged.

### **Local Government Elections (Support for Disabled People to Vote in Person)**

5. **Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its plans to support disabled people, including people with a visual impairment, to vote in person during the 2022 local government elections. (S6O-00696)

**The Minister for Parliamentary Business (George Adam):** The Scottish statutory instruments for local government elections support greater inclusion. New measures include spending exemptions so that events are more accessible to disabled voters. We also recently placed a statutory role on the Electoral Commission to report on the accessibility of elections. In the longer term, Scottish Government officials are developing an electronic ballot solution for those

with sight loss and exploring how other technology may help.

**Stuart McMillan:** The minister will be aware of the issues raised by members and by representatives of the Royal National Institute of Blind People Scotland in relation to ensuring that people with a visual impairment can vote independently at all elections, starting with the coming council elections. Will he provide an update on the planning for the commencement of the new technology and on training that will be delivered to local returning officers and key staff?

**George Adam:** Technology will be important in overcoming barriers that are faced by the sight loss community. Mr McMillan and I attended an excellent event on audio devices at Forth Valley Sensory Centre in 2021. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, it was not possible to undertake all the in-person trials and training that would have been required to introduce the technology at the upcoming local government elections.

However, we are committed to introducing solutions that enable all voters to vote independently. We will take action to implement solutions as soon as possible by continuing to work in partnership with people with sight loss and the electoral community.

**Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con):** The minister's predecessor committed to running some pilot schemes at by-elections to see which scheme would work best. Can he update Parliament on whether those pilot schemes have taken place yet and, if not, when they will take place?

**George Adam:** The honest answer at this point would be to say that I do not have that information right here and now, but I will endeavour to get it to Mr Balfour. He and I can possibly meet at a later date to discuss the matter.

### Covid-19 Certification Scheme

6. **Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government whether the Covid-19 certification scheme allows people who have received vaccines and boosters in different parts of the United Kingdom to demonstrate that they are fully vaccinated, to meet requirements for travel or visiting events where it is a requirement of entry. (S6O-00697)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):** Yes, that is the case. Our Covid-19 certification scheme allows people who have been fully vaccinated elsewhere in the United Kingdom to show either their NHS Covid pass or Northern Ireland Covid certificate for entry to events or travel from Scotland. If someone has received one of their coronavirus vaccinations outwith Scotland, they can upload official proof of vaccination from

that country to their Scottish vaccination record through NHS Inform. That will allow individuals to receive a combined fully vaccinated status on Scotland's Covid status app to show for travel and domestic purposes.

**Sarah Boyack:** The Deputy First Minister will be aware that I raised the same issue with him on 12 January. If someone goes to the NHS Inform website, it tells them how to log a vaccination that they got in England, which is by contacting the venue where they got the jab and putting in their Scottish passcode. If that does not work, they are to phone the helpline.

However, it does not give information about Wales or Northern Ireland. Can the Deputy First Minister confirm that a four-nations approach is being taken and that what he has just suggested will work for my constituents who, as it happens, had their vaccinations in Northern Ireland or Wales? That is still not what the NHS Inform website actually says.

**John Swinney:** If Sarah Boyack would like to drop me a note with the details of that particular case, I will have it specifically looked into. The logic of my answer is that, if people have had vaccinations in other parts of the United Kingdom, they can have that confirmed on their Covid status app in Scotland.

The NHS Inform system should enable that to be uploaded. If that is creating a difficulty in those circumstances, I will have it explored and remedied at the earliest possible opportunity. If Sarah Boyack will be so good as to give me that information, I will pursue that.

**Siobhian Brown (Ayr) (SNP):** Will people who have received both vaccinations abroad be able to have them verified on the Scottish Covid status app, as they can in England?

**John Swinney:** I think that the only caveat that I need to put into my answer to that is that it will be subject to the nature and approval of the vaccine that the individual has had. Providing that the vaccine has been approved by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency, I do not see there being an issue with that.

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** This does still seem to be a problem. My constituent had one vaccination in Wales and another in Scotland. Because Wales does not provide a QR code for a single dose, he is still classed as unvaccinated for travel. He has followed the Scottish Government guidance. He has filled in the form. I have been in touch with the directorate, which said that he should fill in the form again, which he has already done. He is at his wits' end. What can the cabinet secretary advise that he do?

**John Swinney:** Again, the best thing that I can suggest is that Mr Rennie drops me a note with all the details, and I will have it looked at immediately. The logic of Mr Rennie's point is that the gentleman concerned has had two vaccinations, which should be enough to satisfy the requirements for certification through the Covid status app. If Mr Rennie would be good enough to send me a note with the details, I will have the matter addressed and remedied.

**Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con):** Volunteers such as me who took part in the Novavax vaccine trial still do not have the correct vaccination status displayed on the app. Volunteers who have been boosted are showed as having only one vaccination rather than three. Will the Scottish Government look at that urgently, given that being fully vaccinated now means having three vaccinations? At present, volunteers are being disadvantaged.

**John Swinney:** First, I express my thanks to Mr Lumsden and people like him who have volunteered for such programmes. Frankly, we would not be where we are today without their generosity of spirit in doing that. It is therefore imperative that individuals who have made that commitment should be properly certificated for this purpose. I give Mr Lumsden the commitment that I will seek information on the issue and resolve it as quickly as possible.

#### **Face Coverings (Places of Worship)**

**7. John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government, in light of the lifting of some Covid-19 restrictions, whether it will provide an update on when it anticipates the requirement to wear face coverings in places of worship will be lifted. (S6O-00698)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):** Face coverings remain an important measure in reducing the spread of Covid-19, and they are required in most indoor public settings. However, an exemption from wearing a face covering applies for those who are leading an act of worship, and for performers. The exemption applies if the person is separated from other people by a screen or maintains a distance of at least 1m from other people.

We understand that many people are keen to see restrictions regarding face coverings removed entirely in places of worship, and we continue to engage closely with faith and belief organisations on the issue, most recently on 26 January. We are required by law to regularly review all protective measures that are currently in place, and our most recent review concluded that the regulations on face coverings remain proportionate. We will continue to review that regularly and have been

clear that protective measures in places of worship, as in other settings, will not be in place for any longer than is necessary.

**John Mason:** I think that churches and others would totally accept that they should not be given any privileged position. However, given that many sectors, not least schools, are arguing that the restrictions should be lifted for them and people should not have to wear masks, I would like reassurance from the Deputy First Minister that churches and places of worship will not be forgotten about.

**John Swinney:** I give Mr Mason that assurance. I express my warm thanks to those in our faith communities who have been assiduous in applying the necessary restrictions that we have had in place and who, as a result, have enabled members of the public to participate in public worship, which I acknowledge to be immensely important for many people in our society.

I assure Mr Mason of our determination to continue to engage with faith and belief organisations. I give the assurance that we will not keep the restrictions in place for any longer than we judge to be appropriate and necessary for the continued suppression of Covid.

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Individuals attending places of worship are often seated in rows and facing in one direction, and are very often socially distanced from one another. Should we not soon be getting to the point where it becomes an issue of personal responsibility and people can choose to wear face masks in such settings rather than being required in law to do so? That is particularly the case given that we know that, in some cases, having to wear a face mask discourages people from attending places of worship.

**John Swinney:** I certainly hope that that last point is not the case. My answer to the question might help to address some of those issues. I want members of the public who wish to take part in public worship to feel confident about doing so, which brings me to Mr Fraser's first point. The matter cannot really be left to individual choice, because we are trying to create an environment in which it is safe for people who wish to take part in public worship to do so. As I said in my answer to Mr Mason, I acknowledge that to be a significant commitment of individuals in our society. I assure Mr Fraser that these issues are looked at carefully and that we engage closely with the faith communities.

The faith communities have been marvellous at working with us to apply the regulations in places of worship around the country. I thank them warmly for doing so and assure them that the



restrictions will not be in place for any longer than is necessary.

### **Coronavirus (Recovery and Reform) (Scotland) Bill**

**8. Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how measures in the Coronavirus (Recovery and Reform) (Scotland) Bill will support the Covid recovery strategy. (S6O-00699)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):** The bill supports the Covid recovery strategy by embedding reforms in Scotland's public services that, though necessitated by the pandemic, have delivered improvements for people who use public services. It also addresses systemic inequalities that have been made worse by Covid.

The bill maintains the possibility of remote registration of deaths and stillbirths and gives licensing boards the flexibility to hold remote hearings. It extends provisions that allow virtual attendance at court or tribunal hearings. The option to communicate digitally might help people with limited mobility who cannot travel or who encounter difficulties in doing so. The bill also provides additional protection for debtors with unsustainable debt and maintains provisions that have supported tenants and prevented evictions.

**Fiona Hyslop:** Will the cabinet secretary confirm that, as every part of society and the economy has had to transform rapidly in the light of Covid, some measures—such as those on new digital legal transactions—may need a permanent statutory footing that will enable such widely welcomed improvements to be maintained as part of the Covid recovery? Ensuring resilience and readiness for any future pandemic, severe variant or emergency will be part of every country's response in the Covid recovery.

**John Swinney:** The bill that is before Parliament aims to do two things. It aims to embed necessary and practical steps that have been appropriate to sustain public services in the pandemic and to make them permanent when the case for that is arguable.

The bill is designed to update the statute book so that we can respond quickly to any development of the pandemic that could be acute and threatening to public health. The bill contains the appropriate safeguards and caveats to ensure that such measures are used only in exceptional circumstances. It is designed to equip Scotland with the necessary legislation to take into account the experience from the pandemic of dealing with an emergency situation and with practical issues and consequences that arose from the implications of our decisions.

### **Net Zero, Energy and Transport**

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The next set of portfolio questions is on net zero, energy and transport. Any member who wishes to request a supplementary question should press their request-to-speak button or indicate so by entering R in the chat function during the relevant question.

#### **Strategic Transport Projects Review 2 (Consultation Responses)**

**1. Natalie Don (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what level of response there has been to the public consultation on STPR2. (S6O-00700)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport (Michael Matheson):** As of 9 am, there had been 82 completed responses to the public consultation on STPR2. I encourage everyone with an interest in how we invest in transport infrastructure to get involved in the consultation. I am aware that every member will have received details of the consultation, and I encourage members to share them with their constituents. The consultation is open for 12 weeks, with a closing date of midnight on Friday 15 April.

**Natalie Don:** I was pleased to see how the Scottish Government's strategic transport projects review 2 will benefit people and communities in my constituency. I understand that STPR2 relates to national projects and programmes and not to rail enhancement programmes, so potential initiatives such as the reopening of disused railway lines in Renfrewshire and Inverclyde have not made the final list of recommendations, but such transport projects would bring significant local benefit. How might such projects be taken forward? What role can the Scottish Government play in supporting that activity?

**Michael Matheson:** The recommendations on rail that are set out in STPR2 focus on the decarbonisation of the remaining diesel network, measures to increase the amount of rail freight and improving connectivity between our seven cities. However, there remains a pathway for regional and local rail projects to come forward, which is subject to a strong business case being developed and to suitable funding being available. A recent example comes from the project to reopen the Levenmouth rail line.

In addition, the Clyde metro recommendations represent a multibillion-pound investment that, when completed, could better connect more than 1.5 million people to employment, education and health services in the Glasgow city region, including those who live in the member's constituency.

**Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** The response to STPR2 in the north-east has been one of disbelief, disappointment and dismay. Despite the cabinet secretary's weasel words, STPR2 ducks out of dualling the line at Usan, dispenses with the promise of a 20-minute reduction in journey times to the central belt and fails to provide new stations at Cove and Newtonhill. Crucially, there is nothing in STPR2 about the re-laying of rail to Ellon, Peterhead and Fraserburgh.

I ask the cabinet secretary a straight question: will the Government re-lay any rail lines north of Dyce during the period of STPR2—yes or no?

**Michael Matheson:** I will try to be constructive on those matters for Mr Kerr. The focus of STPR2 is national strategic projects. It sets out the national picture that it will take with regard to strategic transport investments. As I mentioned, local and regional projects, including those in the north-east to which the member referred, can pursue a different pathway, subject to their business cases, and that has happened in the past. That pathway would not sit within STPR2 because those projects are not national strategic projects—

**Liam Kerr:** Yes or no?

**Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con):** That is a no, then.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Excuse me, cabinet secretary. Will you resume your seat for a second? I do not want all this second guessing of the answer. The question has been put to the cabinet secretary. Let us listen to his answer.

**Michael Matheson:** That is why a process is in place for local and regional projects to be considered outwith STPR2, which is a national strategic project programme. The projects that the member mentioned have a route through to be considered in the way that has been the case in the past.

**Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** The cabinet secretary is aware that considerable sums and efforts have been expended to develop business cases for the reopening of railway stations in communities such as Beattock, Eastriggs and Thornhill. Those cases were submitted to Transport Scotland three years ago, but it refused to consider them. It said that the projects would be a matter for STPR2. It is therefore astonishing that new railway stations do not feature in the recommendations. The cabinet secretary seems to suggest that they were never going to feature in them. Why do they not feature in STPR2? Why were communities left in limbo for three years, waiting for STPR2, when no intention existed of those cases being taken forward as part of it?

**Michael Matheson:** The characterisation that the member presents is not correct. In these past years, a detailed programme of work took place that considered a whole range of potential interventions across the country that would be seen as national strategic projects. Some of those interventions were ruled out on the basis that they were not viewed as being national strategic projects. However, the schemes to which the member refers still have a route through to be considered, subject to the development and presentation of a robust business case for local and regional projects, in the way that I mentioned to Mr Kerr.

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** In light of what the minister has said, the sooner we get to firmer proposals, the better. I am keen to advance the proposal for a train station at Newburgh, which is strategically important for Newburgh as it is disconnected from many other parts of Fife and Tayside. A vibrant community campaign is backing the bid. Will STPR2 make the construction of that train station more likely?

**Michael Matheson:** I am in danger in repeating myself. Mr Rennie must have heard my previous answers. A process is in place for local and regional projects, just as it was for the St Andrews railway station development and for Levenmouth. Those projects were not in STPR1. They went through the normal process for local and regional developments. Robust business cases were put together and the projects were considered appropriate for investment.

Levenmouth represents a £70 million investment in not just several new train stations, but the reopening of a line. There is a clear history to how such regional and local projects are taken through. They do not sit within STPR2, but a route exists for such projects, including for the station that the member mentioned in his constituency.

**Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green):** The cabinet secretary will be aware of the excellent Campaign for North East Rail and its ambition to connect Peterhead and Fraserburgh to the rail network. Those are currently the two largest towns in the United Kingdom without rail links. I heard the cabinet secretary's answers to the previous questions and I understand that those towns are not explicitly included in STPR2. Does he agree that such links are regionally strategic and that they will be invaluable for the economic transformation of the north-east? Will he support plans to develop those links?

**Michael Matheson:** I recognise the member's interest in those developments. It is important that any rail connectivity project that is proposed, be it in the north-east or any other part of Scotland, has a robust and detailed business case to support what would be a significant financial investment.

There is a process for considering proposals of that nature. I would certainly encourage any member, the stakeholders and those who have been involved in the Campaign for North East Rail to make use of the existing process for considering local and regional transport investments of this nature. Given that it has been successful in a number of other parts of the country in recent years, I see no reason why it cannot also be effective for those in the north-east of Scotland.

### **Clyde Metro Project**

**2. Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what oversight role it plans to take over the Clyde metro project, in order to support its timely delivery. (S6O-00701)

**The Minister for Transport (Jenny Gilruth):** The delivery of the Clyde metro will be transformational for the city of Glasgow and communities, towns and cities in the Clyde area. It is of national significance and is one of this Government's strategic priorities, as set out in the strategic transport projects review 2 recommendations, which are currently out for public consultation.

Following the consultation, one of the early decisions that will be needed will be on the delivery model for the medium to longer term. Senior officials representing organisations that are likely to become involved in the delivery process are already working together to explore suitable governance and oversight.

A programme steering group will meet for the first time this month, chaired by Transport Scotland's chief executive.

**Pauline McNeill:** Last September, Glasgow City Council leader Susan Aitken confirmed that the metro was part of the plan to decarbonise Glasgow, and indicated that it was a multibillion pound project that would be partly funded by private investment. Last month, we learned from the publication of the STPR2 that there is no final design for the metro, no date is attached to its completion and there is no known funding. When will we see genuine progress on this matter? Is there a timetable for the first phase, which I understand is for the air link?

**Jenny Gilruth:** Having lived in Glasgow for a number of years, I recognise some of the challenges with connectivity in the city. As the member will know, Glasgow has one of the lowest levels of car ownership in the United Kingdom and some of the highest levels of pollution. It is therefore really important that we get this right.

STPR2 contains a number of recommendations on mass transport projects, and, as the member knows, this project could be an opportunity for

transformational change, particularly for poorer communities.

The member asked a specific question about costings, and the early estimated cost of the metro project is somewhere between £11 billion and £16 billion, based on the outturn cost of other comparable projects, with a timescale of 25 to 35 years to completion. The project will need longer-term political leadership and a new approach to delivery, but, as I mentioned in my initial answer, that delivery model has not yet been agreed. I cannot therefore give her a definitive answer to the timescale question, but she will recognise from my answer to her original question that the chief executive of Transport Scotland will meet the programme steering group this month, and I hope that we will get the timescale that the member seeks at that meeting.

**Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):** I listened to the transport minister's earlier answer. When I look at the map of the Clyde metro, it is all rather vague. There is a kind of random squiggle coming out to East Kilbride, with a loop around the town, and I am not sure where that is or what the exact route is. When will we get some level of detail on all this?

**Jenny Gilruth:** Graham Simpson is asking about the specifics of something that has yet to be decided. However, I want to make clear that the metro project is an umbrella project that looks at the level of public transport provision to serve and improve connectivity in the Glasgow city region. It will look at a vast range of transport modes that exist under the term "metro" in the GCR context including, of course, subway, tram way, tram, train and bus rapid transit.

I do not want to prejudge the outcome of the initial meeting of the programme steering group, which will take place later this month, in relation to the specifics that Graham Simpson asked about. However, as I mentioned in my answer to Pauline McNeill, I hope that we will get further clarity and detail on some of those specifics at that meeting later this month.

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** Given that some 56 per cent of households in Glasgow do not have access to a car and rely on walking, cycling and public transport, does the Government hope that a Clyde metro scheme will reduce inequalities and help people get to work and education more easily?

**Jenny Gilruth:** I am pleased to say that I share John Mason's optimism. The Clyde metro will create the opportunity to connect people, businesses and the communities of Glasgow and the surrounding areas like never before. Most important, it will connect poorly served areas, which tend to be in the more deprived parts of the

city. That prospect is significant and exciting for us as a nation, for our major cities and, most important, for all the people who live in Glasgow who might feel disconnected from public transport opportunities.

By developing a thorough and accurate picture of social and economic needs across the region, we will ensure that the phasing of the project is designed in such a way as to maximise its positive impacts on reducing inequalities and improving people's lives.

### **Safety and Resilience of Roads and Bridges (North-east Scotland)**

**3. Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to improve the safety and resilience of roads and bridges in the north-east. (S6O-00702)

**The Minister for Transport (Jenny Gilruth):** The trunk road network in Scotland is subject to an annual road safety review, and measures are prioritised where they are expected to contribute to the Scottish Government's 2030 casualty reduction targets.

Our network is made up of route corridors that are of strategic importance to the economic stability and growth and social wellbeing of Scotland. We work closely with local groups and stakeholders in engaging with local resilience partnerships, key businesses and interest groups.

**Alexander Burnett:** The minister might wish to see an ambitious strategic transport projects review, but my constituents will be far keener to see existing issues resolved.

Transport Scotland has said that it will review the dangerous Huntly Tesco A96 junction by August 2022. Can the minister confirm that that date will be met? Will she visit the site to understand the dangers that my constituents face on that rural road network?

**Jenny Gilruth:** Alexander Burnett will know that it is the responsibility of individual local authorities to manage their own budgets when it comes to allocating the total financial resources that are available to them on the basis of local need. However, I note that the north-east has benefited from roads investment in recent years. In addition, there has been £745 million of investment in the Aberdeen western peripheral route.

Alexander Burnett asked a specific question about a road in Huntly. I would be more than happy to meet him on that issue and to seek an update from officials regarding the outcome of the report to which he referred.

**Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** The Scottish Government has a strong record of investing in roads in the north-

east. The city of Aberdeen bypass, which opened fully to traffic in February 2019, was the longest length of road under construction in the United Kingdom at the time, and the programme for government commits to the development of a programme of wider enhanced public transport improvements in the north-east.

Will the minister set out some of those improvements and outline the differences that they will make to the lives of people in the north-east?

**Jenny Gilruth:** One of the recommendations of STPR2 is on rapid transit for the Aberdeen city region. We awarded £12 million from our bus partnership fund to enable work to begin on the development of the rapid transit system and on bus priority measures on key transport corridors.

On rail, we have committed £200 million to deliver improvements between Aberdeen and the central belt by 2026. We will also look at opportunities to improve the reliability and efficiency of the Aberdeen to Inverness rail corridor, alongside our commitment to decarbonise the rail network. That will build on the work that has been undertaken in recent years, including the opening of a new station at Kintore.

Taken together, those improvements will improve region-wide connectivity and increase capacity for freight and passengers.

### **Bus Service Improvements (West of Scotland)**

**4. Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has to improve bus services in the west of Scotland. (S6O-00703)

**The Minister for Transport (Jenny Gilruth):** The Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 provides local transport authorities with enhanced options to improve bus services according to their local needs. Following consultation last year to inform the development of the necessary secondary legislation and guidance, we will publish the analysis report in due course.

The new community bus fund will support local transport authorities to explore the full range of options that is set out in the 2019 act. We are also committed to providing more than £500 million of investment in bus priority infrastructure to tackle the negative effects of congestion on bus services.

**Neil Bibby:** Today, I met council-owned Lothian Buses, which provides the best bus services in Scotland and achieves some of the highest levels of passenger satisfaction. It costs just £1.80 for a single ticket for a 16-mile journey from one end of Edinburgh to the other. Yet, in greater Glasgow and the west, a journey of just two miles can cost £2.50. Does the minister think that that is fair and acceptable? If not, will she support councils in the

west to use new transport legislation powers to take control of bus networks so that we can make bus travel in the greater Glasgow and west area as affordable as it is in Edinburgh?

**Jenny Gilruth:** To respond to the specifics of Mr Bibby's question, the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 provides an enhanced suite of options for local transport authorities, including those in the west, to improve bus services according to local needs. Local transport authorities asked for flexible options so that they can put in place what works for their areas. I note some of the differences between different parts of the country that Mr Bibby highlighted. The act provides for viable options for partnership working and franchising, replacing underused powers in the Transport (Scotland) Act 2001. It also provides wider powers for local transport authorities to run their own buses, sitting alongside their existing ability to subsidise services. The act is not restrictive in relation to the way that local transport authorities can provide their own bus services, be that the running of services directly or through an arms-length company.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Clare Adamson joins us remotely.

**Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP):** This week, around 930,000 young people across Scotland became able to benefit from free bus travel. The scheme will have a positive impact on young people in my constituency, particularly those travelling to college or university. In welcoming the minister to her post, I ask her to provide an update on the number of applications that have been received and the number of cards that have been issued.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Obviously, we are looking at the west of Scotland here, minister.

**Jenny Gilruth:** Ms Adamson asked a specific question with regard to an update on the under-22 scheme. I seek the Presiding Officer's guidance on whether I am permitted to respond.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Please go ahead; however, if there is anything that you can say about the west of Scotland in particular, that would be most helpful, because that responds to the question.

**Jenny Gilruth:** By close of business on 1 February 2022, the improvement service reported that 123,038 applications had been submitted via online platforms. Applications can take up to 10 working days to process and not all of them have yet been approved. However, as Clare Adamson will be aware, the scheme has been open for applications from all eligible young people since 10 January. We had the formal launch of the scheme on Monday, when I visited young people in the city of Glasgow in the west of the country.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Paul Sweeney joins us remotely.

**Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab):** In Glasgow, the recently published transport plan described how the effort to set up a franchising scheme would rely on untested legislation, cost the local transport authority £4 million to £15 million to build a business case and take at least seven years to implement. I was rather disappointed to hear that lack of ambition from Glasgow City Council officers. Would the minister like to engage with Glasgow City Council and other stakeholders, including parliamentarians in the city, to ensure that we can achieve a franchising system for greater Glasgow without those rather unambitious timescales?

**Jenny Gilruth:** I am more than happy to meet Paul Sweeney and to engage with wider partners on the point. However, I refer to some of the points that I made in response to Neil Bibby's question with regard to powers that already exist in the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019.

#### **Nuclear Energy Sector (Meetings)**

**5. Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government when it last met representatives from the nuclear energy sector, and what was discussed. (S6O-00704)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport (Michael Matheson):** Together with Scottish Government officials, I met representatives of EDF Energy Nuclear Generation and EDF Energy Renewables on Thursday 16 December 2021. Various issues were discussed, including the end of generation at Hunterston B, the move into defuelling the continued operation of Torness and the place of nuclear in the just transition. Further discussions might take place in future, as required.

**Martin Whitfield:** Hunterston B has shown what nuclear power can provide for Scotland—clean and reliable power to keep the lights on and prices low. As our nation is in the midst of an energy crisis, will the cabinet secretary confirm that the Scottish Government will invite official representation from the nuclear sector to be part of the just transition energy commission?

**Michael Matheson:** When Martin Whitfield makes reference to the just transition energy commission, I presume that he is referring to the energy just transition programme, which will go alongside our energy strategy and will be a wider engagement. If members of the nuclear energy sector wish to engage with us in helping to shape the just transition report that will go alongside our energy strategy, I am more than happy to give the reassurance that they will have an opportunity to feed into that particular process.

### Island Communities (Connectivity)

**6. Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how it supports island communities with their connectivity to the mainland or other islands. (S6O-00705)

**The Minister for Transport (Jenny Gilruth):** The Scottish Government supports the transport connectivity of our island communities through the procurement and management of the Clyde and Hebrides and northern isles ferry services contracts. In addition, funding to local authorities operating their own ferries was increased by £7.7 million to £19.2 million for the current financial year.

The Scottish Government also provides significant support to air services in the Highlands and Islands, including the air discount scheme, and it continues to directly subsidise the air services from Glasgow to Campbeltown, Tiree and Barra, to enable their continued operation.

I look forward to meeting the member soon, when we are due to discuss further matters relating to the island communities that she represents.

**Jenni Minto:** I thank the minister for that answer and look forward to meeting her soon.

Making sure that people are proactively engaging in the process is crucial to shaping how island communities are able to travel to the mainland and other islands—that has been raised with me this week by Jura community council and the Isle of Jura Development Trust. How is the Scottish Government encouraging community organisations to fully involve themselves in consultation processes?

**Jenny Gilruth:** Jenni Minto is absolutely correct. We need to ensure that communities' views on ferry services input into decision making. I know that there are a number of existing opportunities for feedback and consultation on services, including twice-yearly consultations by CalMac Ferries on timetable changes and regular engagement by Transport Scotland with local elected members, including through twice-yearly ferry stakeholder groups and local ferry committees.

Transport Scotland is also working with CalMac and the ferries community board to see how the current timetable consultation process could be improved, and I will be more than happy to discuss that with Jenni Minto, whom I was due to meet recently. If she has views on how we might do that better for island communities in her constituency, I would be more than happy to listen to those and take on board actions in that regard.

**Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD):** Including free ferry travel in the under-22 bus

travel scheme would level the travel playing field for young islanders and their counterparts on mainland Scotland. If the emphasis is to encourage more young people to use buses, what consideration is the Scottish Government giving to connecting and joining up island communities with fixed links?

**Jenny Gilruth:** Beatrice Wishart raises a valid point. This week was extremely important in terms of the roll-out of the provision for under-22s. However, I recognise that she represents an islands community and therefore her constituency will have different challenges from others.

There are no plans at this time to widen the scheme, but I will take away her points and the issues that she has raised, because I recognise that bus provision in her community might be a wee bit different from bus provision in other parts of the country.

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** What support is available to Orkney Islands Council and Shetland Islands Council, which provide interisland ferry services? Their fleet is ageing, and the cost of replacing ferries is beyond their reach.

**Jenny Gilruth:** We have supported local authority ferries and we will continue to engage with councils, including Orkney and Shetland. The Scottish Government has been clear that although responsibility for internal ferries sits wholly with local authorities, we recognise the funding pressure that that can bring. I note that Shetland Islands Council has bid to the levelling up fund to replace ferry infrastructure for which it is responsible, and the Scottish Government is committed to continuing to engage on those important issues.

### Net Zero Targets (Financial Assistance for Local Authorities)

**7. Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what additional financial assistance it plans to provide to help local authorities meet their net zero targets. (S6O-00706)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport (Michael Matheson):** The Scottish Government works with local authorities to support and fund climate action across a number of key areas, including, for example, the £2 billion learning estate investment programme, which is delivering digitally enabled, low-carbon schools and campuses; the £200 million green growth accelerator programme, which is supporting investment in low-carbon infrastructure; and funding, which we announced only last week, to unlock £60 million for local authorities to invest in

electric vehicle infrastructure over the next four years.

**Carol Mochan:** Some councils, including the Scottish National Party-led Glasgow City Council, have stated that it will cost billions of pounds to bring housing in line with expectations. It appears that the Scottish Government wants councils to get the private sector to help foot the bill, but in smaller and more rural council areas, where massive industry and service sectors are less prevalent, how is that possible?

In South Ayrshire, retrofitting plans alone could cost as much as £575 million. I ask again: what will the Scottish Government do, actively, to help to ease the burden, beyond the low level of support that has been offered?

**Michael Matheson:** We recently published our heat in buildings strategy, which sets out a range of actions that we will take to support decarbonisation of the council and social housing sectors. Record investment of £1.8 billion over this parliamentary session will assist that programme of work.

However, as we set out at the time, the level of investment that will be required to achieve that outcome far exceeds what the public purse is able to provide. That is why we have set up the green heat finance task force, which is looking at a range of options for leveraging in additional private sector investment to support what is a hugely ambitious programme of decarbonising 1 million domestic premises and 50,000 non-domestic premises between now and 2030.

That hugely ambitious programme will require both public and private finance, and the measures that will be put in place in the context of the strategy and the task force will help to address the type of issue that the member highlighted.

### **Net Zero (Implications of Hybrid Working)**

**8. Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what implications the announcement of a hybrid model of working could have for Scotland's net zero ambitions. (S6O-00707)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport (Michael Matheson):** Any significant shift in how we work could have an impact on emissions. Research commissioned by the Scottish Government's centre of expertise on climate change shows that the emissions outcome of home working at an individual level depends on the person's home type and commuting behaviour. In most instances, replacing a long car commute with working from home will reduce emissions, but that also depends on the heating system at home.

The lowest-emissions future is one in which our homes, workplaces and transport networks are low or zero emission. We are committed to supporting the transition that is needed to achieve that outcome.

**Stephanie Callaghan:** Hybrid working during the pandemic forced a necessary shift in working practices in the public and private sectors. The shift triggered flexible thinking about the challenges and opportunities that hybrid working presents. Given that so many emissions are wrapped up in the daily work commute, will the cabinet secretary give detail on the steps that the Scottish Government plans to take to monitor, quantify and evaluate the potential of hybrid working to contribute to this Parliament's bold and ambitious net zero targets?

**Michael Matheson:** From dialogue that I have had with a range of businesses, including at national level, there is no doubt in my mind that many businesses will continue to utilise a hybrid working model beyond the pandemic, given that they have had to put in place structures and arrangements to enable them to continue to operate during the pandemic.

At this stage, the exact nature of the impact that that will have on overall climate change targets is still unclear. Potentially, there will be a positive impact, but a number of mitigating factors could influence that. At this stage, we do not understand the full details, largely because we have experienced unique events over the past two years and we need to build up data and understanding in that regard.

Another impact that we need to understand is the significant impact on our public transport system of a significant change in travel patterns, given that the system is geared up to move a large number of people around on any given day. When those numbers drop back, there is a significant financial impact on the fare box.

As a result of the change to hybrid working and as people continue to operate that model, a number of factors will impact on our public transport system and our climate change targets. We will have to identify those factors and model their impact, so that we can get a better understanding of the overall impact on our climate change targets.

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

## Prevention of Homelessness Duties

### **The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):**

The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-03018, in the name of Shona Robison, on prevention of homelessness duties.

14:55

**The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government (Shona Robison):** The Parliament should be proud of the progressive housing rights that it has introduced for people who experience, or are at risk of experiencing, homelessness. That has been the result of a concerted effort across the chamber. The right to access to permanent accommodation and other rights that the Parliament has already enshrined in Scots law are some of the strongest in the world.

“The Homelessness Monitor: Scotland 2021”, which was commissioned by Crisis, found that rates of the most severe forms of homelessness are substantially lower in Scotland than they are in England and Wales. However, to reach our ambition of ensuring that everyone has a safe and warm place to call home, we want to end rough sleeping and to transform temporary accommodation, so there is more to be done.

Yesterday, we published our latest homelessness statistics. Although in 24 local authority areas use of temporary accommodation has gone down since September 2020, the statistics show that, overall, far too many households are in temporary accommodation. That is not good enough. We must learn from the areas that are making progress and share their good practice. We will continue to work with our partners to use all the powers that we have and to take the action that is needed to reduce the time that people spend in temporary accommodation, to improve the quality of accommodation that is available and to tackle rough sleeping. We must also do more to prevent people from entering the homelessness system in the first place.

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** I am puzzled as to how the minister can claim that we have world-leading legislation on homelessness when tens of thousands of people in Scotland do not have a home.

**Shona Robison:** Our world-leading homelessness legislation has been recognised by many organisations. However, what matters is that we ensure that it is used, that the policy is implemented and that we are able to eradicate homelessness entirely. That will take time; this debate is the next stage of that process.

In 2018, the experts on our homelessness and rough sleeping action group presented us with solutions and we adopted their recommendations in full. Our ending homelessness together action plan, which was based on those recommendations, was refreshed in 2020-21. Stakeholders have universally welcomed the plan, which includes a shift towards rapid rehousing, a reduction in use of temporary accommodation and new homelessness prevention duties. It is the right plan. Those are mutually reinforcing activities: making progress in homelessness prevention improves our chances of progress in the other areas.

Our plans are backed by investment of £100 million pounds from 2018-19 to 2025-26. It is now time to take the next steps on the journey towards ending homelessness through our commitment to introducing new legal duties to prevent homelessness.

**Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con):** Concerns have been expressed about the proposal to remove the right to permanent accommodation and replace it with a right to stable accommodation. All of us would be concerned if that were to be a dilution of Scotland’s statutory housing rights. Will the cabinet secretary confirm that that will not happen, and will she ensure that hard-won housing rights are protected?

**Shona Robison:** The consultation on the matter runs until the end of March. We want to ensure that we get it right, and we want to prevent more homelessness at an earlier stage, so that people do not have to face the trauma and disruption that it brings to their lives. The proposals will strengthen the range of homelessness rights and will not change any existing rights to housing. The proposal on suitable and stable housing is about widening the range of housing options that are available to people who are at risk of homelessness.

I am happy to write to Miles Briggs with more detail about that, but the consultation is open. We are having the consultation to ensure that we get it right.

The prevention review group that we established in late 2019 provided a thoughtful set of recommendations last year. The full package of recommendations informed the proposals in the joint Scottish Government and Convention of Scottish Local Authorities consultation that was published in December.

Strengthening existing powers and changing the way that we work in order to prevent homelessness before it occurs are key to addressing the challenges in the future and will make us a leader in the United Kingdom in homelessness prevention duties. The right to



permanent accommodation for people who are homeless in Scotland provides the strong foundation on which we can build. Our commitment is not to change established rights but to provide legislative change that helps to create a society in which fewer people become homeless in the first place.

We propose introducing new duties on public bodies to “ask and act” to prevent homelessness, so that prevention of homelessness is no longer the sole responsibility of local authority housing departments. We know, for example, that there is often increased engagement with health services before a person becomes homeless. We must get better at identifying such crisis points to ensure that every single risk of homelessness that can be prevented is prevented. That reflects the move to a “no wrong door” approach, so that the risk of homelessness is acted on regardless of the service that is first approached.

There are also new duties proposed for landlords, including in relation to domestic abuse, which continues to be the main reason for homelessness among women.

The proposals do not stop there. They also aim to make changes to existing homelessness legislation to ensure that local authority housing departments are able to act sooner—up to six months before homelessness might occur.

**Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con):** Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

**Shona Robison:** Yes—a brief one.

**Jeremy Balfour:** The cabinet secretary talks about the key role that local authorities will play, but how will they do that when their budgets are being cut yet again this year?

**Shona Robison:** Local authority budgets have been set out in the draft budget, including the addition of £120 million. If Jeremy Balfour thinks that more money needs to be allocated to local authorities, his party should come forward and tell us where that money should come from. I look forward to hearing those constructive proposals.

We know that finding and keeping accommodation after a period spent in an institution can be difficult. We propose that action be taken much earlier, so that people are not faced with homelessness when they leave hospital or prison. This is bold new territory for homelessness legislation in Scotland, and is the right thing to do for individuals, families and communities, in order to prevent the trauma and disruption to lives that is caused by homelessness.

Our proposals are informed by three principles: that there should be a shared public responsibility to prevent homelessness; that there should be earlier intervention across the whole system to

prevent homelessness; and that we must allow greater choice and control for those who are at risk of homelessness. That last point about choice was emphasised by people with lived experience of homelessness, who helped to inform the proposals; we will continue that vital engagement with people who have experienced homelessness.

The proposals aim to drive a whole-system change. We will need legislation and other policy changes if we are to meet our ambitions. There have been good examples of partnership working to prevent homelessness through the adoption of a more person-centred housing options approach to prevention in recent years and, more recently, through joint working between homelessness and other services in response to the pandemic.

An array of important prevention activity has been, and continues to be, implemented through the hard work of local authorities, landlords and other organisations. The consultation proposals seek to improve practice around joint working on prevention in order to ensure consistency of delivery while recognising local circumstances and decision making.

Effective prevention means helping people who are at risk of homelessness before they reach crisis point. It also means considering people’s circumstances in the widest sense, including their mental wellbeing, physical health and other needs. The proposed prevention duties are far reaching and include proposals to address the issues that are faced by those who experience more complex needs, including addiction. That includes new approaches to case co-ordination for people with more complex needs who experience homelessness, and an increased role for health services in provision of supported accommodation.

Improving outcomes for those who have the most complex needs will remain central to our drive to end homelessness. The housing first approach is an important part of our rapid rehousing approach, and offers settled accommodation and wraparound support to people with multiple and complex needs. It was good to see in the homelessness statistics the rise in the number of people getting settled accommodation. Our housing first pathfinder programme, which is the largest of its kind in the UK, has created more than 540 tenancies since 2019, and 84 per cent of those have been sustained.

Understandably, much of our focus in recent years has been on addressing rough sleeping, which is the most extreme form of homelessness. We have concentrated on reducing the use of, and time spent in, temporary accommodation through the adoption of the rapid rehousing approach. Of course, that was thrown into sharper focus by the pandemic; having a robust homelessness strategy

meant that we were able to respond quickly to put measures in place to protect people at risk. All 32 councils have been implementing their rapid rehousing transition plans for the past three years. We have recently committed an extra £16 million of funding to councils over the next two years, thereby bringing the total investment in rapid rehousing and housing first to £53.5 million.

The ending homelessness together action plan and the proposed homelessness prevention duties are part of the wider picture, as outlined in "Housing to 2040". We are consulting until the end of March. Consultation views will inform our final proposals, and our intention is to introduce legislative requirements on prevention of homelessness in the proposed housing bill, which will also cover proposals for our new deal for tenants.

I look forward to hearing what members have to say about the proposals.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the publication of the joint Scottish Government and COSLA consultation on Prevention of Homelessness duties, which seeks views on ambitious plans to strengthen the rights of people experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, homelessness in Scotland; supports the principles as informed by the final report of the Prevention Review Group, which include a shared public responsibility to prevent homelessness; notes that the package of measures in the consultation includes the introduction of new legal duties on public bodies and landlords to "ask and act" on any risk of homelessness, changes to existing homelessness legislation to prioritise early intervention, and maximising the housing options available to people; recognises that approaches to preventing homelessness should be person centred and trauma informed, and agrees that this approach will support the implementation of the human right of an adequate home for all.

**The Presiding Officer:** I call Miles Briggs to speak to and move amendment S6M-03018.2. You have up to seven minutes, Mr Briggs.

15:05

**Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con):** I thank the organisations and charities that have provided helpful briefings ahead of the debate, including Shelter Scotland and Crisis. Both charities have been incredibly helpful in briefing me on homelessness prevention and highlighting what needs to be done to end homelessness and rough sleeping in Scotland. I pay tribute to them and to all those who are working across Scotland to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping.

All parties in Scotland are committed to ending homelessness and rough sleeping by the end of this parliamentary session. Disappointingly, there has been limited progress on reaching that goal, especially here in the capital, with concerning figures being published today.

If we are serious about ending homelessness, we need to see people in sustainable accommodation now, not just good intentions about the progress to be made in the future. No one doubts that ending homelessness is not a straightforward task. Ultimately, we need to have enough homes for everyone in Scotland.

Having sustainable, suitable accommodation that meets the needs of the people and families living in it is vital to ensure that accommodation becomes a stable home. Making sure that local authorities keep people in mind when they plan homes and communities and make decisions about the location and locality of the services available is also very important.

As well as getting people who are currently homeless rehomed, preventing people from becoming homeless in the first place is hugely important. That is why I welcome the publication of the joint Scottish Government and COSLA consultation on the homelessness prevention duties and the work that the prevention review group has undertaken to date.

The plans that have been outlined to strengthen the rights of people who are experiencing or who are at risk of experiencing homelessness in Scotland present a welcome step forward. I have long supported the development of a preventative system; indeed, I welcome the package of measures that is outlined in the consultation, including the introduction of new legal duties on public bodies and landlords to ask and act in relation to any risk of homelessness.

A major flaw in the current system is that people must register as homeless before they are given any housing support or access to services. The current model prevents people from presenting or asking for help at an early stage; often, they are at a crisis point, which is completely counterintuitive to what we are all trying to achieve.

If we want to prevent people from becoming homeless, we must give them the necessary support to stay in their accommodation, as the cabinet secretary mentioned, at least six months ahead of them potentially becoming homeless. Local authorities are still not required to provide housing support before someone becomes homeless. As I have said, that must change if we are going to be more effective at preventing homelessness in all our communities.

Policies such as rapid rehousing are very welcome, but keeping someone in their home is often more important, especially when children are involved. Legislation takes time to put in place and often even longer to implement on the ground in council areas. That is why I hope that the homelessness prevention duties will be given the priority and resources that they require.

The duties will require proper funding—for example, in Edinburgh, we see pressures on local budgets, especially in light of the additional challenges that the capital faces in preventing homelessness. I welcome the conversations that I have had with the cabinet secretary on the issue and I welcome her commitment to take forward cross-party talks with regard to the situation in Edinburgh.

**Shona Robison:** I remind Miles Briggs that we have doubled our ending homelessness together fund from £50 million to £100 million, but we recognise that some local authorities have particular issues around homelessness—relating to refugees and asylum seekers, for example, in Edinburgh—so I am happy to continue those discussions about local needs.

**Miles Briggs:** I look forward to that.

During the pandemic, we saw significant reductions in the levels of homelessness across Scotland and in the capital. I hope that the legislation will continue to enable public bodies to focus their resources and respond in a way that is similar to the response that we saw to the public health emergency during the pandemic. A multisector response to the pandemic facilitated much of that welcome work and should be promoted and expected, as I hope that it will be.

As I said, ending homelessness is not a straightforward task. Having enough homes for everyone is essential, but that is not enough in itself. When someone becomes homeless, it is often due to an obstacle in their life that they have found hard to overcome. That can range from experiences as a result of trauma, addiction, substance misuse, mental health problems or relationship breakdown, for example. Models such as housing first and more assisted living can and should be part of that template for rehousing and supporting people to overcome their personal challenges.

That is why the Scottish Conservatives have called for the roll-out of housing first to be accelerated across all Scotland's local authorities. The cuts that councils face from ministers in the coming budget are a major concern. I hope that leaders across local authorities will not make savings, which they could look to make, from homelessness services or the third sector organisations that support people.

Access to health services and social care is another critically important issue. The homelessness death rate in Scotland is currently double that of England and Wales. There were an estimated 256 deaths of people experiencing homelessness in Scotland in 2020. People who are homeless are three to six times more likely to die prematurely, which is unacceptable and must

be addressed. All of us in the Parliament must work to address that.

Research by the Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland suggests that people who are experiencing homelessness continue to face stigma and additional barriers to accessing health and addiction services. That is why I also believe that we need a review of access to homeless health and social care services, and I ask Parliament to support that by agreeing to my amendment to the motion.

Ending homelessness and rough sleeping in Scotland at the earliest opportunity, and by the end of this parliamentary session, is an admirable goal, but we all need to work to ensure that the action that we want to see becomes a reality.

I move amendment S6M-03018.2, to insert at end:

“; is committed and united in the shared public responsibility to eradicate rough sleeping in Scotland at the earliest opportunity or by 2026; notes that surveys have suggested that over 5,000 people in Scotland have reported sleeping rough at least once per year, with the homelessness death rate in Scotland being double that of England and Wales, with an estimated 256 deaths of people experiencing homelessness in Scotland in 2020; further notes with concern the number of children living in temporary accommodation in Scotland, which has reached its highest levels since records began, along with the number of councils reporting the breaching of unsuitable accommodation orders; notes that research has demonstrated the link between increased interactions with health and social care services and the risk of people becoming homeless; calls on the Scottish Government to help support people into safe and stable housing as quickly as possible with an acceleration in the roll-out of Housing First across all Scottish local authorities; notes the research by the Health and Social Care Alliance that suggests that people experiencing homelessness continue to face stigma and additional barriers to accessing health and addiction services, and calls on ministers to support a review of access to homeless health and care services.”

15:12

**Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests, which shows that I am the owner of a rental property in North Lanarkshire.

We welcome the debate and are pleased to see that the consultation is under way. We support measures to intervene at an earlier stage, and encourage services to work together to respond to people's needs to ensure that fewer people and families face having to rebuild their lives.

Yesterday's homelessness statistics for the six months to September demonstrate that the nation's continuing homelessness crisis is severe and persistent. Each case represents a household of real people, including whole families, children and people with mental health or other problems. They simply want the right to safe, secure,

affordable housing, but, instead, they are going without.

As our amendment says, one in 12 people have been

“forced to experience the trauma of homelessness”,

which shows that the opportunity to go much further to end homelessness, and prevent it from happening in the first place, cannot be missed. In May, we pledged that there should be collective responsibility across public services to prevent homelessness. When it comes before Parliament, we will therefore support legislation that applies such a duty to public services.

Similar to the issue that was highlighted by Miles Briggs, Shelter has drawn to my attention the proposal that would remove the right to permanent accommodation and replace it with the right to stable accommodation. I ask the cabinet secretary to reflect on that and confirm that there will be no regression of hard-won housing and homelessness rights in forthcoming legislation. I ask the Government and Parliament to reaffirm existing expectations that homelessness ends only in a secure, permanent setting.

**Shona Robison:** I will reiterate what I said to Miles Briggs: the proposals will strengthen the range of homelessness rights, and they do not change any existing rights to housing. It is about strengthening, not weakening.

**Mark Griffin:** It is good to have that reassurance, and I am sure that Shelter will be reassured, too. I look forward to debating the detail of the proposed legislation when it is introduced.

In its briefing, Crisis points out that we need to be diligent with the legislation, ensure that it is rights based and that prevention is not perceived as gatekeeping by clarifying the place of homelessness prevention in the current system.

The motion calls for a person-centred approach. Crisis offers the detail of what that would mean: asking people about their situation, their housing needs and the outcomes that they want, so that a personalised housing plan for what will happen next can be agreed. I think that the Government is unsure of the benefits in providing effective rights to review and challenge decisions, but such rights would aid the desire for the system to be person centred.

We also believe that the rhetoric around preventing homelessness must be matched by the provision of resources to local authorities. With councils now being forced to consider further cuts of £250 million, it would be remiss of us to ignore the impact on ending homelessness. Preventing homelessness and ensuring that rapid rehousing transition plans are a success becomes more

difficult in the context of housing policy funding being part of the Government’s general revenue gap in relation to local authorities and its having cut council budgets by almost £1 billion since 2013-14. We know that prevention will undoubtedly save money in the long run, but we cannot afford to starve homelessness services of the funds that they desperately need to do that prevention work.

The Crisis homelessness monitor found that the “primary barrier seen to risk inhibiting future progress”

on the vision in the “Ending Homelessness Together: High Level Action Plan”

“relates to resources.”

It cites that stakeholders were, in general, positive about RRTPs and that they are part of “a radical transformative agenda”, but that

“there was a common view that RRTPs were underresourced”.

A report from the Salvation Army found that overall funding for homelessness and housing support services fell by 18 per cent from 2013-14 to 2019-20. It asks whether there is

“the necessary investment to achieve this transformational change”

that we want to see.

The Salvation Army also found significant differences between the amounts requested and received in RRTPs. The amounts were substantial—almost all local authorities received less than they had requested. One local authority received 2.5 per cent of what it had requested.

**The Presiding Officer:** Please conclude.

**Mark Griffin:** If we are to truly end homelessness and prevent it in the future, we need to make sure that our public services are funded to deliver on their new duties.

I move amendment S6M-03018.1, to insert at end:

“; notes that homelessness in Scotland is rising again, that in 2020-21 over half of the approaches to Housing Options Scotland resulted in a homelessness application, and that 14,161 households were assessed as homeless in the six months to September 2021; believes that the nation’s homelessness crisis is severe and persistent, with one in 12 people in Scotland being forced to experience the trauma of homelessness; notes the findings of the report, Homelessness in Scotland, prepared by The Salvation Army, which found that the overall level of funding for homelessness and housing support services had decreased by 18% between 2013-14 and 2019-20 and asked if ‘the necessary investment to achieve this transformational change’ was being delivered, and the Crisis publication, Homelessness Monitor: Scotland 2021, which found that ‘the primary barrier seen to risk inhibiting future progress on the [Ending Homelessness Together] Action Plan’s vision relates to resources’, and calls on the Scottish Government to ensure that funding to Scottish

local authorities is adequate to ensure that the implementation of the prevention of homelessness objectives and other landmark projects, like Housing First, are not at risk.”

15:17

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** Every 19 minutes, a household becomes homeless. By the time that this debate ends, another four households could be homeless. Last year, 27,000 people were classed as homeless. In addition, 13,000 householders are stuck in temporary accommodation, including—this is shameful—7,500 children.

That is despite the repeated promises of the Scottish National Party, which has been in power for the past 15 years, of action on homelessness. In 2007, the Scottish Government promised to tackle homelessness. In 2012, it passed legislation to end homelessness within months. The Deputy First Minister at the time, Nicola Sturgeon, said that the legislation was Europe’s most progressive homelessness legislation. It would have been progressive if it had actually ended homelessness; it did not, yet the Government persisted in calling it an “historic homelessness commitment” and then a “world-leading homelessness target”.

Homelessness continued at embarrassingly high levels. In 2018, the Government moved to an action plan; that became the “Ending Homelessness Together” action plan in 2019, an end to “ghettoisation” in 2020 and “a continuing national priority” in 2021. As is always the case with this Government, the words are grander than the action. Therefore, members will forgive me for being a little bit sceptical on the latest commitment to a new prevention of homelessness duty. Apparently, the plans are “ambitious” and include new “legal duties” and a

“human right of an adequate home for all”.

Of course everyone is going to support the bulk of those proposals—who would not?—but it is action that counts.

With regard to Shelter’s concerns, I am puzzled as to why, if there is no difference between “permanent” and “stable”, the word cannot just be changed back to “permanent”. That would assure Shelter that there is no dilution of statutory rights in Scotland. If there really is no difference, let us stick with the wording that we are used to.

It is right to pursue early intervention and a person-centred approach, but for the thousands of people who are classed as homeless or living in temporary accommodation, those are just words, to be frank. What counts is action.

The work that was done at the outset of the pandemic shows what could have been done if we had set our minds to it. We got lots and lots of

people off the streets. It was immediate action—the money was found and the difference was made. However, the reality is that, for years before that, funding had been cut—by 18 per cent, according to the Salvation Army.

Jeremy Balfour is absolutely right about this year’s council budgets. Supposedly, there is an extra £120 million; in reality, hundreds of millions of pounds have been cut. Most embarrassingly, the cabinet secretary does not seem to be bothered enough to make the case to the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy for an increase in that funding. She is asking other people to do her job for her.

We have heard about the 256 people who died while experiencing homelessness in 2020. That is one of the highest figures in western Europe and an increase of 40 deaths compared with the previous year. Failed policies on drugs, mental health and housing, with long waits and inadequate services, have produced that figure. If people are living on the streets, sofa surfing or shuttling between temporary accommodation, that takes a huge toll on their mental and physical health and on children’s education and development. It stops people getting on in life. I live in hope—

**The Presiding Officer:** Please conclude, Mr Rennie.

**Willie Rennie:** —that this will be a change and we will end homelessness in Scotland. I live in hope, because we need desperate action.

**The Presiding Officer:** Elena Whitham is the first speaker in the open debate.

15:22

**Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP):** I refer members to my entry in the register of interests, which shows that I am still a serving councillor in East Ayrshire Council. It is also important to advise the chamber at the outset that I was a member of the prevention review group that was convened by Crisis on behalf of the Scottish Government to explore homelessness prevention duties, I was a co-signatory to the ending homelessness together joint action plan, and I have been homeless twice.

I worked for many years in homelessness services, supporting individuals to access, navigate and come out the other end of what was often referred to as the sausage factory. I realised very early on that services were not talking to each other, as siloed approaches had built huge walls, which meant that individuals were often being failed at every turn.

Back in 2002, I tried in vain to argue that adverse childhood experiences, trauma, abuse,

addiction, mental health issues, experiences of being in care and underlying and crushing poverty were all drivers of the high levels of homelessness that we were seeing. They were exacerbated by an ever-increasing drop in the number of socially rented houses and by the severity of the priority need category. Some days, it felt like I was going into battle—another day, another 22-year-old man self-medicating with street drugs. He would be care experienced and have multiple ACEs and severe and enduring mental health issues, and I would be advised to take a set of keys from the low-demand pile of long-term, shuttered void properties, as that was the best that he could hope for. As I tried to pick the least-worst option, I knew that this would be yet another tenancy that, no matter how hard he or I tried, would not be sustained.

I heralded the abolition of priority need, as that direction of travel meant that Scotland—despite what Willie Rennie may say—now has some of the world's strongest homelessness legislation, in terms of giving individuals great legal protections when they are facing imminent homelessness. However, I knew that we needed to increase our housing stock and do much more work to prevent homelessness from happening in the first place.

The housing options approach that was adopted at that time meant that councils were already looking at ways to prevent homelessness by supporting individuals and families early on. However, we in councils were accused of gatekeeping—of preventing individuals from accessing their rights, as no homeless presentation was taken—rather than seen as doing the preventative work that was so desperately needed. For example, women fleeing domestic abuse should not be required to enter the homelessness system; managed moves or support to remain in their homes safely are the ideal solutions.

The ending homelessness together joint action plan is clear that we need to work upstream to prevent people from entering the homelessness system in the first place. The proposals that are being consulted on will do that by requiring public bodies to ask and to act regarding a person's homelessness situation.

A big part of that needs to be about a sense of real choice and control. I knew that housing someone in an area that they did not know and that was far from their supports would increase the likelihood that the tenancy would not be sustained in the long term. Therefore, in the last part of my speech, I will focus on the prevention review group's recommendation on maximal housing options.

Offering a range of housing options to those who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness

gives them choice, control and flexibility in their housing journey. It gives them the same experience as other members of the community, but with additional protections to prevent the future risk of homelessness by ensuring that the chosen option is a suitable and settled one, even if it is in the private rented sector or, more unusually by Scottish norms, shared housing.

The proposed change to the law would not necessarily mean that there would be fewer allocations of social housing to homeless households. Rather, it would mean that a household should not be required to journey through the homelessness system, with potentially long stays in temporary accommodation, as the primary route to accessing social housing.

Despite the sterling efforts of the Scottish Government, local authorities and registered social landlords with regard to the ambitious affordable housing supply programme, there are undeniable pressures on a finite stock of social housing. The PRG proposes a system whereby applicants who would prefer a different kind of housing option are allowed that possibility, which could in theory free up social housing stock. Reducing the numbers going through the system will also free up social housing that is currently used for temporary accommodation and allow it to be used for more settled housing.

Sadly, I supported and cajoled people into permanent social houses, as I believed that it was their best and only option, and I did not listen to them. They knew that a private let near their mum's or a flat share with a friend suited them best. We must afford people a choice.

15:26

**Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con):** Access to affordable, safe and stable housing must be a central part of any strategy to end homelessness. That is why the Scottish Conservatives believe that the housing first approach should be accelerated and rolled out across all local authorities. However, homelessness is not just about the availability of housing. Its causes, as the Centre for Social Justice argues, are a complex mix of personal and structural factors.

Just as barriers to affordable housing and stable employment are drivers of homelessness, so too are adverse childhood experiences, family breakdown, mental ill health and addiction. For example, we know from the most recent homelessness figures that household disputes, both violent and non-violent, accounted for more than a third of homelessness applications. Further, the prevention review group report highlights that

almost a fifth of homeless applicants have had drug or alcohol-related issues.

That is why prevention and early intervention are so important, and why organisations such as Shelter Scotland and Crisis emphasise that homelessness prevention needs to become a priority focus for policy makers.

The United Kingdom and Welsh Governments have already put in place prevention duties. In England, that led to a 46 per cent drop in homelessness, and it led to a 59 per cent decrease over the first two years in Wales. Research from Crisis demonstrates that, during the same period, Scotland experienced a rise in the rate of homeless applications.

As Dr Beth Watts told the Social Justice and Social Security Committee in November last year, it is clear that the needs of those who are particularly susceptible to homelessness are much broader than the remit of local authority housing and homelessness departments. A whole-system, person-centred approach is therefore sensible. However, to be effective, it must be sufficiently resourced. Health and social care services, children's services, police and prisons are already operating at capacity. For the proposed legislative changes to have the necessary impact, those who are charged with implementing them on the ground must be supported. I agree with the emphasis on

"a shared public responsibility to prevent homelessness",

but I sincerely hope that that is not an abdication of the SNP-Green Government's responsibility on the issue.

As an example, we can take Dundee, in my region, which is a city that the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government knows very well. A 16-month investigation into mental health care in NHS Tayside heavily criticised the

"poor service, treatment, patient care and outcomes."

Tragically, figures that were released in December show that the number of suspected drug deaths in Tayside remains at 2020 levels. Last year, although Scotland experienced a 9 per cent decrease in the number of homeless applications, Dundee City Council recorded a 9 per cent increase, while the housing first project has been cut to the bone.

**Shona Robison:** Will Tess White give way on that point?

**Tess White:** I am just about to say my final few words.

Dundee is grappling with a mental health crisis, a drugs crisis and a homelessness crisis, and the council is about to have a funding crisis. It is all

very well putting statutory duties in place, but effective service delivery is key to addressing many of the problems that lead to homelessness. I hope that the SNP does not lose sight of that.

15:30

**Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP):** Housing is important. Good-quality and affordable homes, as well as being good for health, support valuable local jobs. They are a good example of creating a wellbeing economy.

We all agree that the best way to end homelessness is to prevent it from happening in the first place. Scotland already has a strong framework of housing rights for those who are recognised as homeless or are threatened with homelessness. Under Scots law, a person should be treated as homeless even if they have accommodation, if it would not be reasonable for them to continue to stay in it.

If someone is legally homeless, they are entitled to stay in temporary accommodation while the local authority checks their eligibility for a permanent home. Local authorities have a pre-existing legal duty to help people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. That legal duty includes the need to provide information and advice on homelessness and its prevention, and to offer temporary or permanent accommodation.

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 established the right to review homelessness decisions and introduced the duty on registered social landlords to assist local authorities in rehousing homeless people. Anyone who finds themselves homeless through no fault of their own must be entitled to settled accommodation in a local authority or housing association tenancy, or in a private rental, not in bed and breakfasts or hotels for more than seven days.

The new proposals under the duties to prevent homelessness build on the strong housing rights that already exist in Scotland for people who become homeless.

Homelessness is often a traumatic and unsettling experience that can have a profound impact on the lives of those involved, including children. It is right that early action should be a shared public responsibility and that we give people who face homelessness more choice and control over where they live. A lack of choice can compound the distress that is already being felt by the person who is experiencing homelessness. I strongly agree that those who face homelessness should have an appropriate degree of choice in where they live and have access to the same accommodation options as other members of the public do. That point was made very well by my

colleague Elena Whitham, who expanded on the benefits of getting it right the first time.

In relation to choice, it is only fair to acknowledge that, in my constituency, demand for social housing far outweighs availability. Thousands of people and families are on waiting lists, and they find their choices severely limited and the situation in which they find themselves limiting.

As we are discussing housing, I take the opportunity to mention, again, the importance of rent affordability. When wages are not going up, year-on-year rent increases are putting additional pressure on families at a time when household budgets are already stretched. Rent is the single largest cost for many families, so getting the affordability bit of affordable housing right is crucial and can make a real difference in preventing poverty and improving people's lives.

Therefore, the investment that the Scottish Government is making in preventing homelessness and in building affordable homes is very welcome. By building more affordable homes, we provide warm and safe places for people to live. By intervening at an earlier stage and encouraging services to work together to respond to people's needs, we can ensure that fewer people and families have to rebuild their lives and be affected by homelessness.

15:34

**Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab):** I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests, where I have registered that I own property for rent.

Tackling the homelessness crisis, which has been severe and persistent, must be an absolute priority in this parliamentary session. Homelessness is one of the biggest challenges that our country faces today, and we must tackle it with purpose to protect those who are at risk of experiencing homelessness in the future.

To give context to the seriousness of the situation that we face, I note that, as has been mentioned previously, Shelter Scotland's reports highlight that, between April 2020 and March 2021, a household in Scotland became homeless every 19 minutes. In that same timeframe, 11,804 children were in households that were assessed as homeless, and more and more people are finding themselves with nowhere to stay as the numbers rise again today.

Those figures are devastating, and we must make policy interventions to address them. However, they cannot just be treated as numbers on a sheet. They represent a traumatic experience for individuals and families that has left them

without a permanent home, and they must act as a prompt for MSPs across the chamber to seriously consider the issue of homelessness and what we can do to address it. The fact that around one in 12 Scots has experienced homelessness is disgraceful and is the result of a lack of serious action over many years.

However, not acting is no longer an option—we have no choice now but to be radical in our response, with transformative policies to eradicate homelessness. Policies that are linked to early intervention and prevention play a significant role in this.

As Scottish Labour fully supports early prevention methods to tackle homelessness, it welcomes the consultation as an initial step, albeit with questions over the delivery of its commitments and how they will be financed.

Transformative change is long overdue. We have known for long enough that homelessness is preventable; that cases in our recent history could have been avoided; that more families could have had better lives; and that more children could have had greater opportunities. We have to get this right for those reasons among so many more.

The consultation allows us to go further, to be bolder and to make the changes that we need to see. However, it is critical that the financial decision making of the Scottish Government does not put at risk the implementation of any of the prevention of homelessness objectives that are set out.

I must raise concerns at this stage. I hope that I can be forgiven for having little confidence in the Government's ability to take appropriate preventative measures to reduce and eventually eradicate homelessness. Scotland's councils have seen their budgets stretched to their very limits by the SNP Government. Cut after cut and year after year, the SNP has shown total disregard for local authorities that are desperate for investment to deliver more council housing and prevent homelessness.

**Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP):** Does the member agree that it might help the situation all around if local authorities could get their void properties up to scratch?

**Carol Mochan:** I hope that the Government can make huge commitments to local authorities, which desperately need it.

A clear difference exists between what the SNP promises to deliver and what it actually delivers. The Scottish Government must commit to ensuring that adequate and appropriate funding will be offered to our councils. That commitment cannot be more empty words from the SNP. The



Government has to back up its words with actions and we will hold it to account in doing so.

Where there is the political will to address issues, steps can be taken to address them. However, investment, political will, support and resources are needed—all from the Government, which must support local authorities. The Scottish Government must match their words with actions. People need, expect, and deserve better, and the Scottish Government must act now to deliver.

15:38

**Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP):** I refer members to my register of interests, as I am a serving councillor on East Lothian Council.

“Preventing homelessness: It’s everybody’s business” was the headline in the briefing that we received from Crisis in preparation for the debate. In its programme for government, the Scottish Government committed to strengthening existing homelessness prevention legislation and introducing a new duty on public bodies to ask people about their housing situation and take action if needed, thus supporting the development of the culture of early intervention. I welcome the publication of the consultation on the prevention of homelessness duties.

The plans to strengthen the rights of people who experience or are at risk of experiencing homelessness in Scotland are ambitious. We all have a responsibility to prevent homelessness, and it is right that the consultation introduces the new legal duties on public bodies—I will touch on that point and on its importance later—and on landlords. The new duties would prioritise early intervention and maximise the housing options that are available to people, using person-centred and trauma-informed approaches. In my 15 years as a councillor, I have seen many heartbreaking evictions of people, including of young families, people who fell ill and people who got into financial trouble after relationship breakdowns.

Why do we need the legislation? We have heard the figures already. One in 12 people have experienced homelessness. That is far too many. It is a very traumatic experience, as we have heard from Elena Whitham, who has had experience of it herself, and from constituents. By acting as quickly as we can and offering support, we can reduce the number of people who are pushed into homelessness.

Of course, ending homelessness does not mean that no one will ever lose their home again. It means that, through prevention, it will happen very rarely and, when it does, it is brief. Scotland can become a world leader in ending homelessness, but we need clarity in the legislation for those who

are threatened with homelessness and on our current prevention measure duties.

Preventing homelessness would also reduce the use of temporary accommodation. In my local authority, there is a severe shortage of suitable temporary accommodation. It is also very expensive and an inefficient use of resources. People who live in temporary accommodation have usually arrived there because of a change in circumstances, such as a marriage breakdown, a bereavement, the loss of a job and so on. It is a very traumatic time.

Cuts to universal credit and increases in energy costs and national insurance will put people into poverty, which has a major impact in this area.

As we have heard, homelessness prevention needs to be embedded as a clear national and local priority. Formal and closer cross-agency coordination is key as we move forward. I recently met Women’s Aid East and Midlothian and we spoke about rehousing women who had to leave the marital home as a result of domestic abuse. There is lots of experience of that and we need to work more closely on that type of homelessness. I heard about a lack of dialogue on rehousing young adults who have stayed in care settings for longer than they needed to—two or three years longer, in some circumstances. We have heard about people who are recovering from addiction, and the intense level of support that they need. The housing first approach has helped. Local cross-agency coordination is key.

The Crisis cross-sector group that Elena Whitham mentioned recommended two main things. The first was to place duties on a range of public bodies based on the principles of asking people about their housing situation and, where necessary, acting upon that information. The second one—and this is the key part—is changing the current statutory homelessness framework so that local authorities must assist people who are at risk of homelessness, working in partnership with relevant partners such as health and social care and social landlords.

The existing housing options framework has to be put on a statutory basis. I have had too many cases and spoken to too many constituents who have been dealt with by different housing officers in different ways. We cannot have that continuing. Dealing with that would go some way towards addressing people’s risk of homelessness.

The proposals can bring many benefits. They would require more assistance to be provided to households that are facing major housing problems at an earlier stage, preventing them from reaching crisis point and giving them a stronger voice and more control during the process. They would also help to clarify the legal framework, join

up services and provide more accountability. They would ensure that people can move as fast as possible into housing that meets their needs, makes the best use of the options that are available within the housing market and gives them the dignity of a roof over their heads.

15:42

**Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green):** Twenty years ago, the Scottish homelessness task force called for more effective prevention of homelessness. It identified the need for more work on evictions and support for people leaving institutions such as the army, prison and hospital. We have known what is needed for a long time, but progress has been slower than we would like. I am proud that the Scottish Government and the Greens are consulting on new plans to make housing more affordable and secure through measures such as rent controls, a housing first approach and restricting evictions.

The new short-term licensing scheme and control area legislation will also give councils the power to take action locally. The joint Scottish Government and COSLA consultation presents a new set of legal duties as another tool for more homelessness prevention, and that is welcome, but changing the law is just a foundation for a wider change in culture, training and awareness, systems and processes, stronger leadership and adequate budgets.

The prevention review group report states:

“Responsibility to prevent homelessness should be a shared public responsibility”

and every part of the Government must consider how it can contribute to that. However, we need to consider capacity. Placing responsibilities on already overstretched local authorities and health boards might not result in the improvements that we need, especially if we do not simultaneously address the root causes of homelessness.

Global inequality is rising, with wealth increasingly concentrated at the top. New peer-reviewed research shows how income inequality drives hundreds of people into homelessness every night by pricing lower-income households out of housing markets. We also know that people who experience financial hardship and inequality are at increased risk of mental health challenges and that poor mental health is one of the biggest causes of homelessness.

We know, too, that the growing number of homes that are being used as short-term lets, combined with the high numbers of second homes and the use of flats and houses as investments, rather than homes, inflates house prices and rents to the point at which many people cannot afford to remain in their homes or neighbourhoods. That is

a particular problem in rural and island areas, where temporary homeless accommodation is often far away from local support networks and registered services such as general practitioners.

We should support initiatives such as the smart clachan initiative in South Uist, which provides affordable and community-led housing, workspace, vegetable gardens and community support, and the project at the Achtercairn site at Gairloch, Wester Ross, which is a great example of a rural 20-minute neighbourhood. Such projects can counter homelessness and depopulation in rural areas.

However, we must also address the larger forces that I have outlined. We must consider more progressive taxation to tackle inequality. I look forward to the process of developing a fairer form of local taxation, including the work of the citizens assembly on council tax.

Finally, we must resist the clawback of devolved powers through the likes of the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020 and the proposed Brexit freedoms bill. Scotland must be allowed to follow its own path and to prioritise tackling inequality, promoting fairness, dignity and respect, and ending homelessness.

**Jeremy Balfour:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. That was a very interesting contribution by Ms Burgess, but we were not able to intervene on her. Rather than having a debate, we listened to a speech. The chamber is not busy this afternoon. At what point will members be encouraged to give their speeches in the chamber, or a method of intervening be provided, so that we can intervene in constructive ways on members who participate remotely, in order that we can have a debate instead of just listening to speeches?

**The Presiding Officer:** Mr Balfour will be aware that, at the moment, the facility exists for members to participate remotely, for reasons that he understands and that are related to public health issues. Work is under way to look at a system that will enable members who are participating in the chamber and members who are participating remotely to intervene. I have benefited from a pilot of that. However, that would obviously involve a procurement. A further update will be provided in due course.

15:47

**Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** I will start by recognising the amazing work that was done by the homelessness and rough sleeping action group in getting us to where we are today. The focus on early intervention could save a lot of people a lot of pain, and I am proud to be a member of the committee that has been tasked with scrutinising the forthcoming legislation.

That is proof that the Scottish Government is rightly considering homelessness as a social justice issue, not simply one of buildings.

For me, the key aspect of the cabinet secretary's motion is its mention of a trauma-informed approach. Too often, people make assumptions that are based on one word: "homeless". Employers will take one look at your care-of address and will chuck away your CV as quickly as I chuck away a Tory leaflet. Your pals start to judge you, and doctors do not want to prescribe you medication. However, not only do people often become homeless due to trauma, such as abuse, but the effect on your life of being without the security of a home cannot be overstated. I remember crying as I put clothes and belongings into bags to give away because I had nowhere to keep them. I remember leaving an appointment at a crisis centre and beginning the 10-minute walk to my friend's house, where I would be staying that night, knowing that I would not be able to walk all the way. I made it just out of view of the centre and sank down by a fence. I was too sad to cry. I do not know how long I sat there, but the weight of feeling that I was a burden, that I had lost so much and that, essentially, I was too unwell to ever get myself out of that situation was literally weighing me down to the ground.

There is no question but that homelessness is a trauma. From the experience itself, which includes the constant worry, to the way that you are treated, even by those who are there to help, it is not something that you ever get over.

I ask those who try to gatekeep by deciding who is homeless and who is not based on whether they chose—I say "chose"; usually, they were forced to do it—to leave the place where they were living before, whether they are sleeping on the streets, a sofa or somewhere where they are just not safe, to please consider what I have said and stop diminishing such horrific experiences.

In its briefing prior to the debate, Shelter Scotland reminded MSPs that, in order for homelessness prevention efforts to succeed, there have to be enough homes for people to move into. In the Highlands and Islands, that is particularly critical. There might be wiggle room for people to move a few bus stops away in a bigger city, but a council house being available in Caithness will not help someone who has a job and a family in Skye.

When thousands upon thousands of buildings made to be homes are being bought up and used as anything but, communities are being destroyed—particularly in rural areas where the stock is low to start with. Within Highland Council, young people in Skye are most likely to present as homeless at home. That Skye also houses a large percentage of the Highlands' Airbnbs is not a coincidence. The proliferation of short-term lets in

fragile communities is forcing young people in my region into homelessness or out of the region.

I am glad that we are taking time to talk about a duty to prevent homelessness. I am also glad that Scotland is a world-leader in that policy area. However, every day, I see the damage that is being done to the Highlands and Islands and I know that we can and must do more, not only to build more homes, but to make sure that they stay as homes.

We need a rounded approach to tackling homelessness. With the new deal for tenants, duties to prevent homelessness and an ambitious house building programme, I believe that we are getting there. However, I hope to see stronger action on second and holiday homes alongside those policies in future. *[Applause.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** I call Jeremy Balfour, to be followed by Jackie Dunbar.

15:51

**Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con):** There is no need to clap before I start, but thank you.

I want to contribute in what I hope is a positive and constructive way. There is a lot of agreement with regard to what the Government is trying to do, and I think that there is cross-party support. As we have heard from a number of speakers, this is a massive issue here in Scotland. Every 19 minutes, a household becomes homeless. More than 11,000 children were assessed as homeless last year, which is equivalent to 32 children per day. In light of those figures, there is no doubt that homelessness is an issue that requires a swift and concerted effort to be tackled. The basic necessities that a home provides—such as shelter and security—are fundamental, and the only way that people can thrive and fully live their lives.

Our amendment sets out an ambitious target. Eradicating rough sleeping by 2026 is no easy task, but if we focus our efforts on tackling the root causes of homelessness and building robust systems to deal with cases quickly and efficiently, I believe that it can be met. However, there is a caveat to what I have said. That target can be met only if there is the appropriate funding for local authorities and the third sector. We can have the best legislation in the world and warm words in a chamber, but if you are a local authority in Scotland or a third sector charity working with people and you do not know where your money is coming from or whether your budget is being cut in real terms, you cannot provide those services. As I have said previously in the chamber, I used to work for a charity that helped people with homelessness. Each December, we were offered a letter of redundancy, because there was no

guarantee that there would be funding for next year. That cannot go on.

**Shona Robison:** Jeremy Balfour will be aware that, at the moment, we put about £80 million into discretionary housing budgets. More than £60 million of that is to mitigate the bedroom tax. Would he therefore agree that it would be better if the UK Government scrapped the bedroom tax, so that we could use that more than £60 million for other homelessness services? Would that be a good use of funding?

**Jeremy Balfour:** As the cabinet secretary likes to point out on a regular basis, we all make political choices. I have been elected to this Parliament to make political choices. If the Scottish Government would work with the powers that it has and use them more effectively, rather than keep sniping about Westminster Governments, homelessness would be much less of an issue.

It is clear that, when we talk about ending homelessness in Scotland, we should not talk of some kind of utopia when nobody will ever be in the position of losing their home. No Government can guarantee that—at least, not while the population maintains a degree of free choice. Rather, we are talking about creating a system in which no one is forced to sleep rough, because the system is ready and waiting to aid them in finding accommodation.

We found that system during the pandemic. Here in Edinburgh, rough sleeping was almost completely eroded during that time. Why? Funding was provided and local authorities, the Scottish Government and the third sector worked together. However, two years on, rough sleeping is happening again. That is a challenge for all of us, but for this Government in particular.

We want to work together. I want to work with anyone in the chamber who truly wants to eradicate this blight on Scottish society, but we cannot do that with warm words; we can do it only with action and money.

**The Presiding Officer:** I call Jackie Dunbar, who will be the last member to speak in the open debate.

15:55

**Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP):** I note my entry in the register of members' interests, which says that I am still a serving councillor at Aberdeen City Council.

I am pleased to speak on the Scottish Government's motion, and I welcome the publication of the joint Scottish Government and COSLA consultation on prevention of homelessness duties. In Scotland, we already

have strong rights for those who find themselves in a homelessness situation, but it is important that we strengthen the legislation around early intervention, to give people facing homelessness more choice and more control over where they live. Early action should be a shared public responsibility, and we should be looking to act as early as possible to ensure that disruption to people's lives is minimised. At the end of the day, everyone should have a home to call their own, no matter who they are, what they do for a living or what they earn. It is their right to have somewhere they call home.

We all have a duty, which is why I asked Carol Mochan whether she agreed about the void situation. Aberdeen City Council currently has 1,200 council houses that are sitting empty, which costs our tenants and the housing revenue account £2 million. One thousand and two hundred council houses out of our stock of, I think, 22,000, is a large number, and they could go a long way in helping the homelessness situation.

Improving access to early interventions will, I hope, reduce the need to use temporary accommodation facilities. Although temporary accommodation provides a safety net for those at risk of homelessness, it can prove to be very expensive for local authorities and tenants alike. Ensuring that quick access to sustainable accommodation and suitable support is available if homelessness occurs will help to stop the cycle of homelessness that can happen. Putting in place adequate support to sustain existing tenancies will also save the individuals involved from the incredibly stressful and traumatic experience of going through the homelessness process to get rehoused.

At this point, I would like to say a big thank you to the team at Aberdeen City Council. Kay Diack and her homelessness unit do an absolutely brilliant job. Engaging with tenants who are facing homelessness has been successfully implemented in Aberdeen, and the council, in partnership with Turning Point, is running a housing first scheme to support tenants with multiple needs to move away from homelessness. Housing first is proven to be successful in supporting people who have histories of repeat homelessness and who experience multiple disadvantages into independent and stable accommodation. Once housed, they are provided with supportive services and connections to community-based support so that they sustain their housing and avoid returning to homelessness.

It is essential that we look to strengthen our existing homelessness prevention legislation and ensure that there is a duty on public bodies to ask people about their housing situation and take action if needed, as early intervention is absolutely

key. Placing a legal duty on health and social care services, children's services, police and other public bodies to ask and act to prevent homelessness really will be game changing for people who are potentially facing homelessness.

I whole-heartedly support the motion.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** We move to the closing speeches.

15:59

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests.

It is unacceptable that far too many people in Scotland today are forced to experience the trauma of homelessness. There was a 3 per cent increase in the numbers last year. According to the Scottish Government's report, "Homelessness in Scotland: 2020 to 2021", a quarter of homeless households have children. That is a worrying statistic.

Indeed, it is worrying that, in this day and age, under the Scottish National Party, child poverty is on the rise, the cost of living is on the rise and many children are living from day to day without the security of a safe place to sleep. The SNP-Green Government must put the welfare and safety of children first.

Carol Mochan talked about the devastation that homelessness causes for individuals. The consultation on the duty to prevent homelessness is an opportunity to change things and look at how we can intervene early and provide joined-up services. Mark Griffin said that all services should have a duty to prevent homelessness, as some services can pick up issues much earlier than council departments that deal directly with homelessness can. The point was amplified by Tess White. People need to be given help and assistance before they become homeless—that is key.

Mark Griffin also talked about the £1 billion cut that local government faces, which means that councils cannot react in the way that we want them to. Councils are at the front line of prevention and rehousing, but they are underfunded.

Carol Mochan talked about her lack of confidence in the new initiative due to the lack of investment. Willie Rennie made that point, too. Without investment, the policy will be useless and will be just another empty promise from this Government.

We need early intervention—it is a must. Miles Briggs said that people seek help when they are homeless rather than beforehand, but we often hear of people who are threatened with

homelessness being told to stay put until they are actually homeless. I have come across that in my casework. That means that the change in the person's housing situation goes largely unplanned. Ruth Maguire and Elena Whitham were right to say that people should have choice, but at a time of crisis there is no choice. Early intervention is key.

Mark Griffin, Willie Rennie and several other members talked about the change from "permanent" to "stable" when it comes to the right to accommodation. I know that the cabinet secretary heard that, and I hope that she takes on board the point, which has been made by Shelter and which was emphasised throughout the debate.

A major cause of homelessness in rural areas is the rise of second homes and the holiday homes market, as Ariane Burgess and Emma Roddick said. Young people simply cannot compete when they are on low wages or have unstable incomes, and they can be forced to move miles away from home, probably into towns and cities. However, the Scottish Government is not building affordable homes in rural areas or taking measures to retain such homes for the local population. I recently heard that only two housing associations are building in the Highland Council area, because it is close to impossible to retain the houses.

**Shona Robison:** Rhoda Grant has raised the issue of short-term lets. As Emma Roddick pointed out, legislation to control short-term lets was important. Will Rhoda Grant say how Labour voted on the short-term lets legislation just a few weeks ago?

**Rhoda Grant:** As the cabinet secretary knows, the legislation on short-term lets was not right and did not take account of local circumstances. Had the Government been keener to devolve power to local authorities to shape it in the right way, it could have made a real difference.

**Shona Robison:** Will the member take an intervention on that point?

**Rhoda Grant:** I am not sure that I have time.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Ms Grant, I can give you a bit of time back if you want to take the intervention.

**Rhoda Grant:** Okay.

**Shona Robison:** The whole point was that many of the powers in that regard were devolved to local authorities to use as they see fit. I just do not understand why Labour supported the approach in committee but voted against it in the chamber. That does not make sense.

**Rhoda Grant:** It does make sense. The cabinet secretary knows well that my colleague Mark

Griffin tried hard to make that legislation acceptable to people in Scotland, especially in rural areas, where short-term lets can provide an income. It has to be balanced with population retention. If we do not do that, it will not work.

I will speak quickly about domestic abuse. Many of us have been contacted by constituents who are homeless at a desperate point in their lives. Many of them have had no choice but to flee. I agree with Elena Whitham that they should be supported to keep and stay in their own homes, but many are far too traumatised to do so. We need to ensure that there is safe and secure accommodation for them and their children, to support them in rebuilding their lives.

Willie Rennie and Jeremy Balfour talked about the intervention that took place during Covid, taking people off the streets and putting a roof over their heads. That shows that, where there is a will, there is a way. We can end homelessness only if sufficient resources are provided to local authorities. Putting additional responsibilities on local authorities without the funding will mean that there is no change. The Scottish Government needs to enable them to look after the people who are most in need at the time when they need it.

16:06

**Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I am grateful for the opportunity to close the debate on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives.

Reducing and preventing homelessness should be a priority for Governments of all colours. Preventing homelessness is not only already a statutory obligation in many cases, but clearly a moral obligation.

We have heard much about the context of homelessness in Scotland today. It is clear that there is much more to do to tackle the problem. The latest figures, which were released today, are a stark reminder of the situation, and make for uncomfortable reading. It is not acceptable that nearly 5,000 adults in Scotland sleep rough at least once a year and that thousands of individuals are in temporary accommodation the length and breadth of Scotland.

Given that situation, I welcome what is to be, and has been, discussed in the prevention of homelessness duties consultation, which was launched jointly by the Scottish Government and COSLA last month. The consultation is right to talk about the fight against homelessness being a shared responsibility, and to stress the importance of intervention in cases of possible homelessness. It also mentions the importance of protecting women who have been made homeless as a result of domestic abuse. That is vital, because

there might be many more such women than we are aware of from statistics.

There is much to be done to ensure that the proposals become a reality. We are talking about reality; not words, but actions. For example, although Shelter Scotland has welcomed the £10 million that has been committed to ending homelessness together in next year's budget, it says that that does not go far enough and that more is required.

It is right that councils are expected to carry out their duties to deal with homelessness, but their budgets are being cut. They know their responsibilities and are trying to do the best they can, but they need resources behind them, which many members have spoken about in the debate. Councils will take on more duties and obligations, so they must be given support to do that.

On the measures that are proposed in the consultation, Shelter Scotland has expressed the opinion that the only way to deal with the cycle of homelessness is to build more homes. That is a fact, but there remains a significant difference between what is needed and what is talked about in relation to social housing. The problem has not been helped by the Scottish Government's having missed its target for building affordable housing in the previous parliamentary session.

The level of investment needs to be greater. The Chartered Institute of Housing Scotland has said that the £831 million that has been committed to affordable housing in next year's budget is "still not enough" for the SNP to meet its target of building 110,000 affordable houses by 2032.

It is clear that the battle against homelessness continues and is a struggle. As far back as 2018, the Scottish Government stated its target in the "Ending Homelessness Together: High Level Action Plan" that it had put together, but that plan still needs to ensure that homelessness is tackled.

Following on from that, three years later we see that housing first has been talked about and praised, but much more still needs to be done to ensure that housing first is a reality. It is not happening across Scotland—only pilots and projects are taking place. If we are to tackle the issue, we need to ensure that the funding is there. There has been £10.8 million of investment in the housing first scheme, but more needs to be done. We have talked about measures such as our proposed help to rent scheme. That would help to move things forward.

I thank all those who have given us briefings, including Shelter Scotland and other charities. I also want to talk about some of the contributions from members. My colleague Miles Briggs talked about suitable and stable homes. They are part of the process, but to ensure that there are such

homes, there has to be a balance between what is taking place and the funding that goes with it.

We must also talk about drug misuse, mental health issues, the lack of funding, sustainable accommodation and social care. We see that three to six times more people are falling between the cracks and are even dying in Scotland because of their situation. They have mental health issues and social housing issues; those are part of the mix. Mark Griffin said that there is collective responsibility; the Government and councils have a collective responsibility to deal with the issue of sustainable accommodation.

Willie Rennie gave us some stark statistics. He mentioned 27,000 homeless people and 13,000 in temporary accommodation, including 7,500 children. Action needs to be taken, but we cannot do that when hundreds of millions of pounds are being removed from budgets.

Tess White gave a passionate speech about her region, and talked about housing first being escalated across Scotland. She also talked about applications, but we need social, health, children's, police and prison services to work together to make sure that we can achieve that.

Jeremy Balfour talked about cross-party support. There is cross-party support, but we cannot cope when one individual every 19 minutes becomes homeless. We want homelessness to be eradicated by 2026 and we believe that that can be achieved.

We are all aware that there is no single cause of homelessness or single solution to it, but my party believes that it is possible to end rough sleeping by 2026. It is clear that that is possible only with significant action on and investment in the issue.

I conclude by urging the Government to use a multipronged approach to tackle homelessness, and I urge it to leave no stone unturned, because the people of Scotland deserve that approach and we should provide it.

16:12

**Shona Robison:** I welcome the contributions from across the chamber in what has, in the main, been a constructive debate on taking forward the consultation on the proposals. I will refer to as many speeches as I can and will pick up on a couple of issues that were raised.

Miles Briggs was right when he said that it is not just about bricks and mortar. It is also about access to services, whether they are addiction services or support services. That is what the housing first model and the rapid rehousing housing plans are based on.

Mark Griffin talked about the comments of Crisis and the Salvation Army in relation to funding. I make the point that some of those comments predate the announcement of an additional £50 million in the programme for government. I will talk about resources later, because the subject was raised by a number of members.

On Willie Rennie's point, I say that stakeholders have said that our legislation is world leading. On the language, I point out that housing being "suitable and stable" was a recommendation of people who have lived experience of homelessness. Such housing is an option for those who are at risk of homelessness that can be prevented. Provision of permanent housing is the duty when a person is assessed by a council as being unintentionally homeless. That will not change. It is about choice for people who are at risk of becoming homeless and about options for people who are homeless. We are talking about slightly different things; I hope that that is clear. It is important to recognise the wishes, in relation to language, of people who have lived experience of homelessness.

I very much recognise Elena Whitham's experience and knowledge of the need to work upstream, her input to the work of the prevention review group before coming to Parliament as an MSP and her highlighting of the needs of domestic abuse victims.

Tess White talked about Dundee. I think that, in many respects, I understand more fully than anybody else in the chamber the issues of mental ill health and drug deaths in the city, and how important it is to resolve them and to move forward. On her comment about housing first, Dundee City Council has gone quite far on closure of hostels, which is what we want. It was one of the pathfinders for housing first and is using organisations including Scottish Women's Aid to provide specialist services to people who need such services in the city. I think that her portrayal of housing first was not wholly fair.

**Miles Briggs:** The Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee has been told, among other statistics, that between 5 per cent and 8 per cent of people who need support will need assisted living support. What is the Government's view on that and how such support can be funded? It is a really important issue for which local authorities need additional support.

**Shona Robison:** Local authorities sometimes struggle in that area, so I have asked officials to look in more detail at how we could help them in relation to support for people who have very complex needs.

Ruth Maguire talked about affordability; the new deal for tenants has affordability of rent levels at its heart.

Carol Mochan talked about council funding; I will come back to that. The only point that I will make is that we can see from statistics that 24 of the 32 local authorities have made progress on reducing use of temporary accommodation, so there is something to be said for sharing best practice and adopting what works across all local authorities.

Ariane Burgess made the point that prevention pathways are important for those who are at greater risk of homelessness. Emma Roddick gave a very powerful testimony of her own lived experience and spoke about the need for consistent action—for example, on second homes and short-term lets. That is something on which members perhaps need to reflect.

Jeremy Balfour talked about resources; I will talk about resources more generally. In addition to the resources for local government, we have put a huge amount—£100 million—into ending homelessness. In the draft budget, we have maintained the £23.5 million that has been allocated to local authorities annually for homelessness prevention and response measures. We have provided a further £10 million from the ending homelessness together fund for next year.

In addition, we have a discretionary housing payment budget of £80 million, which councils monitor and administer on our behalf, and £68 million of which is for mitigation of the bedroom tax. I am all for political choices, but it is a bit difficult when members come here asking us to make different political choices when political choices that have been made by the UK Government impact directly on our budgets. If we did not have to use £68 million to mitigate the bedroom tax, we could spend that nearly £70 million on other homelessness services. The political choices that we make are important, but so are the political choices that are made by others that impact directly on our budgets. That is, perhaps, something on which the Tories here should reflect.

In addition to all that, we have allocated £831 million for affordable homes this year, which is part of £3.5 billion that will be allocated over this parliamentary session. I make the point that that is head and shoulders above what any other Government in these islands is delivering on affordable housing. Although I accept that there is more to do, there has to be some recognition of the resources that this Government is putting into housing and addressing homelessness.

I will mention a couple of other issues. Jackie Dunbar spoke about voids. There has been an

issue with turning voids around because of the pandemic, for all the reasons that we understand. We want, of course, to ensure that local authorities turn voids around as quickly as possible. If members understood it, they would see that the problem is about getting tradespeople and supplies in order that voids can be turned around. Global supply issues are hampering councils' ability to do that.

Rhoda Grant said that she wants more action to address short-term lets. In my intervention, I made the point that consistency on that issue is important, because we need to give local authorities the basket of powers that they require in order to address it.

Finally, there is a lot of consensus that prevention is better than a cure for homelessness. The earlier we can intervene to prevent homelessness through the measures that we are already taking, as well as the measures that are included in the proposals that we are consulting on, the more we can support people to avoid homelessness in the first place, which I am determined to do.

**Tess White:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

Shona Robison, the cabinet secretary, misrepresented what I said about the housing first team in Dundee. I said quite the opposite. Members can look back at the text; I said that the team had been “cut to the bone” and that it needs more support. I was misrepresented.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you for that. It was not a point of order; it is not a matter for the Presiding Officer. The Presiding Officer is not responsible for the content of statements that are made by members. There is a corrections mechanism for the *Official Report*, which the member might wish to look into.

That concludes the debate on prevention of homelessness duties.



## Scottish Income Tax Rate Resolution 2022-23

**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 next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-03019, in the name of Kate Forbes, on the Scottish income tax rate resolution 2022-23. Members should note that the question on the motion will be put immediately following the conclusion of the debate. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak button now, or put R in the chat function.

16:22

**The Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth (Tom Arthur):** I draw the Parliament's attention to the procedural connection between this debate and rule 9.16.7 of the standing orders, which states that a Scottish rate resolution must be agreed before stage 3 of the Budget (Scotland) Bill is able to proceed.

This is the first Scottish rate resolution debate of the new parliamentary session, and it is also the first in our partnership Government with the Scottish Green Party. The passing of the motion will put into effect the rates and bands of Scottish income tax for 2022-23, as set out in the budget on 9 December last year.

As minister with responsibility for public finance, I recognise the vital and dynamic role that tax will have in delivering on our ambitions of building a greener, fairer and more prosperous Scotland. Shortly after the budget, the Government was pleased to publish Scotland's first framework for tax, which sets out how we will approach tax policy and make decisions on tax over the course of this parliamentary session.

The framework demonstrates our commitment to open government and transparency. As part of that commitment, ahead of the Scottish budget, we engaged extensively with a broad range of stakeholders. I was encouraged to see so many different organisations and members of the public respond to our pre-budget consultation, and I thank them for doing so. Once again, the key message from stakeholders was the need for certainty and stability in the tax system. We heard that message, and we have also been clear that, at a time when living costs are rising, taxpayers in lower income brackets should not pay more tax.

That is why we have proposed no change to the rates of income tax in 2022-23. The starter and basic rate bands will increase in line with inflation,

and the higher and top rate thresholds will remain frozen in cash terms at their 2021-22 levels.

The Scottish Fiscal Commission forecast that our decision to freeze the higher rate threshold in 2022-23 will raise £106 million in additional tax revenue. That means that we can invest an extra £106 million in the widest and best-funded range of public services that are available anywhere in the United Kingdom, including universal free prescriptions and tuition fees.

The Institute for Public Policy Research Scotland agreed that our Scottish income tax policy was a welcome measure

“raising much-needed additional funding for public services”.

Income tax accounts for around 30 per cent of the Scottish budget, providing vital revenue for key public services such as our national health service. We have used our limited powers over taxation to support those in society who need it most, and this year is no exception.

While this Government delivers on its commitment to certainty and stability, the UK Government is—perhaps this is an understatement—in a state of chaos, presiding over the most severe cost of living crisis in a generation. The UK Government's autumn budget offered little respite from that—a hike to national insurance was announced that even the chancellor is trying to distance himself from.

The decision to increase national insurance while reducing the lifeline universal credit uplift last October, despite our representations, is yet another hammer blow to families across Scotland. The people of Scotland deserve better than that.

In direct contrast to the UK Government, the Scottish budget has set out a range of ambitious actions—within our limited resources—to support households and reduce inequalities. From investing £197 million to doubling the “game-changing” Scottish child payment from April, to committing more than £831 million in 2022-23 towards the delivery of more affordable and social housing, it is a budget that delivers for the people of Scotland.

In addition, under the plans that we are putting before Parliament today, the majority of Scottish taxpayers will pay less income tax than they would elsewhere in the UK for the fifth consecutive year.

All that is at a time when Scotland's block grant faces a cut in day-to-day funding for each year of the spending review compared with 2021-22, in addition to the continuing impacts of Covid-19 and Brexit.

In practical terms, between 2021-22 and 2022-23, resource funding is 7.1 per cent less in real

terms. Despite those funding challenges, the Scottish Government remains committed to a fairer and more progressive approach to taxation, raising additional revenue for public services and supporting those on low incomes. Our income tax policy for the coming year delivers on that commitment.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that, for the purposes of section 11A of the Income Tax Act 2007 (which provides for income tax to be charged at Scottish rates on certain non-savings and non-dividend income of a Scottish taxpayer), the Scottish rates and limits for the tax year 2022-23 are as follows—

(a) a starter rate of 19%, charged on income up to a limit of £2,162,

(b) the Scottish basic rate is 20%, charged on income above £2,162 and up to a limit of £13,118,

(c) an intermediate rate of 21%, charged on income above £13,118 and up to a limit of £31,092,

(d) a higher rate of 41%, charged on income above £31,092 and up to a limit of £150,000, and

(e) a top rate of 46%, charged on income above £150,000.

16:28

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** As the minister has rightly reminded us, it is the convention of this Parliament under the standing orders that a rate resolution must be agreed before stage 3 of the budget bill process.

Although political parties will inevitably have very different views about tax policy, a restraining order is upon us, which means that, if we voted against the rate resolution, we would, in effect, be preventing tax being collected, with the uncertainty that that would create for taxpayers and for those working on payroll for the next financial year. I am sure that we can all agree, particularly this year, given all the challenges of Covid, that that would be irresponsible and create greater instability and uncertainty. I put on record that we will certainly not oppose the rate resolution, even if we have very different views from the Scottish Government about tax policy.

In recent weeks, the Parliament has witnessed several debates—in the chamber and in committees—about the economic priorities as we continue our efforts to emerge from the pandemic. Despite the different tax policies of the different political parties, I think that we are agreed on what the objective should be: namely, to improve Scotland's productivity and its labour market flexibility, especially in relation to the skills gap and retraining, and pursuing economic growth—although I am not entirely sure that the Greens share that particular agenda. We shall see.

We are very keen that Scotland remains attractive for investment, which is why we do not want Scotland to be the highest-taxed part of the UK, because that creates disincentives not only for business but for families who want to work and live in Scotland.

On 9 December, we were very pleased to hear the cabinet secretary confirm in her budget statement that the income tax rates for 2022-23 will remain unchanged. We were much less pleased about the adjustment to basic rate bands, which has put 68,000 people into paying more tax. On the Conservative benches, we believe that we need to be extremely careful about any policy that will lead to some divergence, and here is why. I refer to the Finance and Public Administration Committee's report on scrutiny of the budget, which we have debated several times in recent weeks. It concludes that Scotland's economic underperformance is "deeply worrying". That is because the official forecast is that low wages, poor productivity—which, obviously, feeds lower wages—weak investment and changing demographics are having a downward impact on income tax receipts, and that comes at the same time that Scotland's welfare burden is increasing and there are worries about rising inflation.

The Scottish Fiscal Commission shows us that, for the medium term at least, income tax revenues are not increasing sufficiently fast, as they would have done had income tax remained aligned to UK rates. In other words, our greater tax powers in this place and our higher taxes are not being accompanied—certainly not as yet, and certainly not in the SFC's forecast—by the increased tax revenues that Scotland so desperately needs.

We also know, of course—I do not know how many times we have said this in the past few weeks—that what is extremely worrying is the net financial gap of £190 million shortfall that we have, and the prediction is that that will rise, possibly, to £417 million in four years' time. I think that these are very serious statistics, because—

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** Will the member give way?

**Liz Smith:** Yes.

**John Mason:** I wonder whether the member would accept that if we had not raised tax, we would be in an even worse position.

**Liz Smith:** No, I do not accept that and I do not think that that is borne out by a lot of the economic forecasts. There are serious issues regarding the amount of revenue that we are in effect not getting in because of the tax policies of the current Scottish Government. I do not think that what Mr Mason says stands up to the information that we have in front of us.

As my last comment, I want to say something about the fiscal framework. John Swinney and the UK Government signed it in 2016, and the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy will no doubt have to sign the new one with Simon Clarke in due course. The committee rightly sets out that there are very important issues to be debated. Although we will have very different views about borrowing powers, I think that there is some agreement on some issues on which we can make progress, and we look forward to hearing more from the cabinet secretary, who I know is meeting her counterparts very shortly.

The finance committee report was both comprehensive and very hard-hitting. It gives the Parliament an awful lot to think about. In the meantime, there is the legislative requirement to pass the rate resolution.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Daniel Johnston, who joins us remotely.

16:33

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** Similarly to Liz Smith, I would reflect that this is in some ways an odd debate, but it is a very important one. Although it might be a little hypocritical for me, while sitting at home, to remark on the lack of people who are sitting in the chamber for the debate, it is perhaps a regret that there is not more interest in it. It might be about a technical requirement, but matters of taxation are hugely important and we need more discussion of these matters rather than less.

Let me also start with some points of agreement. I think that the Scottish Government is correct to leave the rates fundamentally unchanged and to raise the thresholds in line with inflation, thereby alleviating so-called fiscal drag at a time when we seek to both build a recovery and alleviate economic damage. It would be wrong to increase levels of taxation. That approach stands in sharp contrast to that of the UK Conservative Government, which is planning to introduce a national insurance rate rise that will apply to absolutely everybody in the most regressive and cruel fashion, whereas the Labour Party has proposed a windfall tax on utilities, which could be used directly to alleviate the cost-of-living crisis that is resulting from rising utility bills and other costs. I say gently to Liz Smith that her points on Scottish Government policies stand in sharp contrast to the actions of her party's Government at UK level.

More importantly, we need to look at the detail, not least because of the implications that the comprehensive spending review will have in years 2 and 3, when fiscal plans will be under much greater pressure, and because of the Scottish

Fiscal Commission's insights in recent months on income tax growth.

It is important to look first at the detail of what the Scottish Government has done on income tax. Although I broadly support its progressive approach, not every impact of the changes in the levels is progressive, and nor do the measures go as far as they could. If we look at the impact, we find that those who earn under £25,000 will pay just 65p less tax in 2022-23 than they paid in the previous year, whereas those who earn £25,000 or more will pay £4.57 less. That is not a progressive impact.

More importantly, if we measure ourselves by the standards of the UK Government, we find that, in essence, the levels and rates in Scotland are only marginally more progressive. Those who earn less than £27,850 will pay just £21 less tax in Scotland than those in the rest of the UK. That inflection point is incredibly low. I do not think that £27,850 is a point at which people suddenly become rich. We need to give more consideration to the fact that people in Scotland who earn above that level are paying more tax. We also need to think carefully about whether we could use other tax powers, such as the ability to create new levies that might promote behaviour change with regard to reaching net zero.

More importantly, and to echo some of Liz Smith's insights but not her prescriptions, we need to look at the longer-term trends that the Scottish Fiscal Commission has highlighted. We have higher rates of taxation for higher earners, but we have lower revenues. We are raising £190 million less through our income tax measures than we would have been if income tax had not been devolved. That is because we have grown our tax base more slowly than the rest of the UK has done.

The explanations from the Scottish Government point to oil and gas and the situation in the south-east of England, but that does not explain the whole picture. Virtually every Scottish region underperformed every other UK region, and Scottish regions certainly underperformed the UK average, in terms of both growth in earnings and the number of employees in the economy.

The explanation involving oil and gas does not bear much scrutiny either. The east of Scotland was the second-worst performing region in the whole of the UK, and it is largely unaffected by changes in the oil and gas sector. The east of Scotland also has many of the things that point to success for the south-east of England. The financial services and tech sectors are just as prevalent in Edinburgh as they are in the south-east, but we are lagging in that area.

I do not pretend that I have the answers, but these are serious issues that need serious examination. We also need to look at the workforce participation figures that we have at a time of labour shortages. Again, we have the supply-side levers in relation to skills and education policy, so we should at least be able to outperform the UK average, even if we cannot necessarily outperform every single region of the rest of the UK.

Those are long-term trends. We need strategic and sustained intervention. We need to acknowledge the relatively limited steps that have been taken to date, and we need to look at the impacts that they have had. However, ultimately, we need to talk much more about tax—both about how we raise it and, more importantly, how we grow wages and in turn grow the tax revenue that we generate so that we can invest in public services.

16:39

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** This time last year, the rate resolution was agreed to against the backdrop of a country coming out of a second lockdown. Many millions remained on furlough, and the scale of critical public borrowing was so colossal that tax increases would have been quickly consumed.

Thankfully, we are in a significantly better position now than we were then in respect of the virus, but many people's personal finances are no less precarious now than they were then. The cost-of-living crisis hangs heavy over the debate. Energy prices, food prices and rail prices are already squeezing people from left, right and centre. Inflation forecasts, the national insurance hike and the potential 50 per cent uplift in the energy cap mean that more pain is to come.

That is why it is important for the income tax system to provide stability at this time. We do not propose substantial changes to the rates and bands of Scottish income tax. Over the parliamentary session, there should be appropriate and affordable indexation of the thresholds.

Systems need time to bed in. There is a lot to be said for allowing alterations to the tax regime to take effect, so that behavioural change can be properly measured. The pandemic's disruptive impact has made that picture all the murkier.

However, it would be remiss not to recognise the income tax issues that the Parliament will need to navigate—we have heard something of them. Our Parliament is maturing. We have come a long way since John Swinney, as finance secretary, unilaterally allowed Holyrood's tax-varying powers

to lapse in 2007 and did not tell the Parliament that he had done that until 2010.

Scottish Liberal Democrats have fought hard for tax powers every step of the way. Having such powers means facing up to the challenges and responsibilities that come with them, which cannot be avoided. We can look to the Scottish Fiscal Commission, among others, to provide clarity. The SFC points to the pressures that will come from having what it calls

"slightly slower growth in income tax revenue than the rest of the UK but faster growth in social security spending."

Professor Graeme Roy from the University of Glasgow summarised the problem succinctly for the Finance and Public Administration Committee. He said:

"When the fiscal framework was signed up to and we agreed to have greater devolution, there was an acceptance that risk would be built in around Scotland's economic performance relative to that of the UK. What has been striking is that, since that devolution of taxes, that risk has all gone in a negative way, in that Scotland has been underperforming relative to the UK as a whole."—[*Official Report, Finance and Public Administration Committee*, 14 December 2021; c 28-9.]

What should be additional spending power for the Parliament is being offset by growth in income tax in Scotland lagging behind that in the rest of the UK. We have lower productivity, an ageing population and slow growth in average earnings across Scotland, compared with more rapid growth in earnings elsewhere in the UK, which is underpinned by financial services.

All those issues are structural and cannot be resolved by altering the income tax rates and bands that are before us. How those rates and bands deliver for Scotland will be traced back to how the Government and the Parliament respond to the structural issues.

16:43

**Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP):** I will keep up the debate's brisk pace. Given the multiple shocks to the economy from Brexit, the pandemic, spiralling energy costs and the impending rise in national insurance rates that the UK Government is to impose, I welcome the fact that the cabinet secretary has not added another shock to our system. By only increasing the starter and basic rate bands by inflation, she has produced proposals that bring a degree of welcome stability.

A significant and constant challenge is the instability of forecasts. Since the Scottish Fiscal Commission's previous forecasts in August 2021, its forecasts for income tax revenues in 2022-23 have changed by £400 million. That forecasts can change so significantly in the short run should

make us wary of laying too much store by longer-term forecasts.

I have in the past pointed out that forecasting, including from the Office for Budget Responsibility and the UK Treasury, is far from an exact science, and in turbulent times when behaviours at the level of both individuals and businesses can change quickly, forecasting models can often be subject to considerable error. My main message is therefore that we must be particularly vigilant on actual outcomes, rather than investing too much faith in forecasts.

One of the weaknesses that we face, however, is that too much of the tax base overall is not under the control of the Scottish Government. As Paul Johnson of the Institute for Fiscal Studies put it in *The Times* on 20 December this past year,

“We know from the experience of Scotland and Wales that income tax can be at least partially devolved, as can stamp duty on property transactions. There is no reason in principle why a slew of other taxes shouldn’t eventually be devolved to all three nations.”

Indeed, as chair of the Independent Fiscal Commission for Northern Ireland, he has argued for the devolution of corporation tax, for which I know that some members have argued too.

At a time of public health challenges, we too should reflect on Paul Johnson’s independent view of another area of tax. He argues that

“the devolved governments have responsibility for public health but cannot alter duties on alcohol. That’s one reason Scotland was forced down the route of a minimum unit price for alcohol, increasing the profits of those selling alcohol rather than increasing tax revenues.”

In the here and now, the cabinet secretary does not have the type of flexibility that would allow her to use a wide range of tax powers. Given the constraints and challenges of our times, I fully support the Scottish Government’s proposals on tax as strongly as I disagree with the UK Government’s national insurance hike.

16:46

**Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con):** As my colleague Liz Smith mentioned in her opening remarks, the Scottish Conservatives will not oppose the rate resolution ahead of the stage 3 proceedings on the Budget (Scotland) Bill. It is a procedural necessity, which means that income tax can continue to be collected in Scotland.

We are a party of lower taxation, but we equally recognise the uncertain fiscal situation that the pandemic has created. Funding the economic recovery must come first.

At first glance, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy’s commitment to freeze income tax rates for the year ahead is welcome,

especially after the SNP’s outrageous U-turn on its manifesto pledge to freeze the basic rate of income tax in the previous parliamentary session—a U-turn, let us not forget, that both the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister insisted would not happen.

However, the SNP-Green Government’s failure to adjust the higher rate threshold according to inflation means that thousands of Scots still face a de facto tax hike, to the tune of £106 million.

**John Mason:** Will the member give way?

**Tess White:** I have only just started.

The income tax freeze does not detract from the fact that Scotland is still the highest-taxed part of the UK. The Scottish higher rate threshold might have been maintained at £43,662, but that figure is still significantly lower than the UK’s higher rate threshold of £50,270.

Those in Scotland who earn more than £27,850 will pay more in income tax in the year ahead than if they lived elsewhere in the UK, which means that hundreds of thousands of workers in Scotland who do the same job and earn the same wage have less money to spend than their counterparts in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

**Tom Arthur:** That point comes down to a fundamental political difference. The member states that Scotland is the highest-taxed part of the UK, but 54 per cent of income tax payers in Scotland will pay less tax than if they lived elsewhere in the UK. The member should also recognise that people who live in Scotland are entitled to a range of benefits—free prescriptions, no university tuition fees—that are not available to people who live in England.

**Tess White:** I will repeat what I have said—that those in Scotland who earn more than £27,850 will pay more in income tax in the year ahead than if they lived elsewhere in the UK.

The SNP says that its tax system is the fairest in the UK. Our teachers, nurses, and police officers might take a different view. We want Scotland to be a competitive place in which to live, work and do business, especially as we begin to emerge from the pandemic and focus on economic growth. Divergence in the tax regime cannot become a deterrent.

We know, for example, that the UK Government has had to compensate more than 14,000 armed forces personnel posted or based in Scotland, otherwise they would have taken an effective pay cut. I know from my own experience in human resources and industry that organisations will be reluctant to inflict a less favourable tax regime on their staff. That is more important than the other things that have been mentioned.

The reality is that more tax powers and higher tax rates are bringing Holyrood lower revenues. That is the view of the Scottish Fiscal Commission, and it is one that we must take seriously.

Yesterday, the First Minister pointed to further evidence that the threat from Covid-19 is receding. As we emerge from the pandemic, we must address the reasons why Scotland is lagging behind almost all other areas of the UK in key indicators of economic performance, as the Finance and Public Administration Committee highlighted in its budget scrutiny report.

Low growth in Scottish earnings and productivity, boosting labour force participation for young people, and providing adequate skills and training to meet the challenges and opportunities of the future are all issues that must consume our time and energy as policy makers during the current parliamentary term.

16:51

**Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green):** I quite like talking about taxation policy, so this part of the annual budget process is usually either my favourite part or the bit I really cannot stand. It is my favourite part in the years when we have a substantive discussion about taxation policy, but in the years when we simply rehash chunks of the stage 1 debate, it is quite frustrating. Today, I think that we have erred on the side of a substantial discussion about tax, and I welcome that.

There are some points about this year's income tax rates that I have made before but I want to make again. However, before I get to that, I would like to make a wider point. I cannot be the only one who is frustrated by the familiar pattern of budget debates in this Parliament. The overwhelming majority of our time is spent discussing, scrutinising and critiquing the spending proposals, with little regard being paid in most years to what we discuss in relation to the rates resolution package. Opposition parties quite legitimately want to see more money being spent on the areas that they prioritise. In last week's debate, the Conservatives proposed changes that, by my rough estimates, would have cost at least £0.5 billion, and the Labour Party's suggested changes came to more than £1 billion.

**Liz Smith:** Given what Ross Greer is saying about the importance of this kind of debate, even if not many members seem to be attending it this afternoon, does he think that considering a finance bill alongside the budget bill would be an advantage to the Parliament because it would mean that we could engage in greater scrutiny?

**Ross Greer:** I am grateful for the intervention because that is an interesting proposal, and the

Finance and Public Administration Committee should look into it before making proposals about long-term reforms to the budget process.

We have not had a particularly informed public debate in the past few years, and that lets the Government off the hook. It is easy to dismiss Opposition proposals as lacking credibility when they lack credibility, but that was not the case in every year of the last session. Ahead of the 2018-19 budget, there was a collective understanding that a serious discussion about income tax was due, given its recent devolution. All five parties were offered the same opportunity at that point. We could submit a set of income tax proposals and the Fiscal Commission would project how much they were likely to raise. From memory, I believe that four out of the five parliamentary parties took up that opportunity, and the budget debates in that year were all the better for it.

Income tax is not the only revenue-raising mechanism at the Scottish Government's disposal, so each party did not come out with comprehensive taxation proposals, but they added a depth and credibility to the debate that has been missing in recent years. The Greens certainly found it helpful in our budget negotiations to have a set of figures in front of us that supported our proposals for additional spending, particularly on local government, rather than the imbalance of power that exists when only the Government has access to key pieces of information during the budget process.

I welcome the positive response of the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy at yesterday's meeting of the Finance and Public Administration Committee to my proposal that a similar opportunity be afforded to every party on an annual basis, or whenever we set the budget, if we move to multiyear budgeting. I do not think that it is an unreasonable expectation that we should all set out our spending policies and our taxation policies at budget time. That would, at least, be much more interesting than the often tedious and repetitive routines that we have all found ourselves in, and it would nullify the claims that a fully costed proposal is one whose price tag has been worked out, despite no effort whatever having been made to explain where the money would come from.

I am quite sure that, in any given year, various combinations of parties would not necessarily want to make any changes to the existing tax policies, but if those same parties were to propose additional spending, the onus would be even more clearly on them to explain where they would cut spending in order to fund those proposals. Such a system would help the Government and the Opposition. It would challenge all of us to make best use of the Parliament's powers to deliver for the people who elected us. I would welcome

thoughts from colleagues across all parties on that proposal.

Of course, I welcome today's rate resolution, especially the freezing of the upper bands, which will raise another £106 million for our public services. Given the pressure on public services and the substantial cut to our budget by the UK Government, that additional money will certainly be put to good use.

The Greens support the rate resolution that the minister has proposed.

**The Presiding Officer:** We move to closing speeches.

16:56

**Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab):** I am pleased to close for Labour—as I always am—in this important debate on the Scottish income tax rate resolution for the financial year 2022-23.

As was the case last year, the debate comes at a slightly unusual time in the budget process, but I appreciate and understand why the Government has acted in the way that it has, and I welcome the certainty that it will bring to families and businesses as we move forward.

Labour will not oppose the rate resolution tonight, but I caution the Government against taking that as Labour wholly endorsing the budget proposals or, indeed, the income tax proposals that are contained in the resolution. We have concerns about the rates and, in particular, the disproportionate impact that they will have on lower earners compared with higher earners.

According to the Scottish Parliament information centre, people who earn less than £25,000 a year will pay only 65p less tax in 2022-23 than they did the previous year. In contrast, those who earn more than £25,000 a year will pay £4.57 less tax than they did in the previous year. As my colleague Daniel Johnson pointed out, the inflection point here is around £28,000. Even those who are under the threshold of £27,850 will make an annual saving of only £21, relative to those on the equivalent rate in the rest of the UK. We are talking about a very marginal saving and one that is pretty inconsequential, given the alarming rise in the cost of living across the UK. Therefore, although it is technically true that Scotland is somehow the most progressively taxed part of the UK, that claim is marginal and the proposed level of taxation will not make a meaningful impact on the average household.

We face a cost-of-living crisis. With the price of necessities such as energy, food and petrol rising across the board, inflation looks to be on course to hit 6 per cent over the year. That brings with it the prospect of the Bank of England's monetary policy

committee increasing interest rates. In that context, it seems rather bizarre that the Conservatives are griping about Scotland being the highest-taxed part of the UK when their colleagues in the UK Government are proposing to hike national insurance contributions. That is a regressive measure, which will disproportionately hammer those on the lowest incomes.

**Liz Smith:** I do not doubt for a minute that there are serious issues with the cost of living, including the potential increase in national insurance contributions. That is a big concern. However, does Paul Sweeney not recognise that the proposed rise in national insurance contributions will be dedicated to helping the health and social care budgets following the pandemic, to which most parties agreed?

**Paul Sweeney:** I note the fiscal effects that the pandemic has had, but I recall that, during the election campaign that was fought in 2019, the Conservatives committed to investing in improving social care and the national health service and providing a care service that was fit for purpose while making a commitment not to raise taxes—those improvements were to be funded through borrowing. With borrowing at such low rates—the current rates of interest are negligible—that would seem to be a very worthwhile investment to make instead of hammering the lowest-income households. The Conservatives' proposed policy of national insurance increases is fiscally regressive and I regard it as indefensible.

On that basis, I think that it is fair that the Government in Scotland is choosing to keep rates broadly in line with where they were last year. However, that should not preclude us from having a serious conversation across civic Scotland about how we view taxation and the priorities for the next few years.

It is evident from the Scottish Fiscal Commission's December update that the Scottish economy faces several challenges. However, the most pertinent of those is the likelihood of a £190 million black hole in income tax revenues in the coming financial year and a potential £417 million funding gap in the financial year 2026-27. Although I accept that right now—in the midst of a pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis—may not be the time to have a full and frank conversation about tax rates more generally, we will need to do that in the near future, before that potential funding gap hits us. We already see the impact of timid tax policies and unambitious Government fiscal policy. It leads to a £250 million cut to local authority budgets in the coming financial year, cuts to skills and education budgets and a curtailing of investment in public services and infrastructure. We therefore need to have that mature conversation in the coming months and years.

This Government promised to replace the regressive and inefficient council tax in 2007, but it is now encouraging the use of council tax-raising powers to offset the disproportionate cuts that it has imposed on local authorities. The people who are suffering most in all of this are our constituents, many of whom are vulnerable and unsure about how they will navigate the next few years. These income tax proposals will do very little to alleviate their concerns. I urge the Government to bring forward proposals for how we can shift the tax burden away from hard-working families and towards multinational corporations, the top 1 per cent of earners and the owners of large, rent-seeking assets such as land. We should also look towards future technological disruptions, with the transition to electric highways, the move away from internal combustion engines and petrol, and the development of local heat networks, which will move utility ownership to a more local level.

Today is not necessarily the time or place for those detailed discussions, but it is clear that timid and income-centric policies will not result in the revenue that is required to see Scotland prosper. It is therefore a conversation that needs to be had. For the purposes of today, Labour will not oppose the resolution. However, I again urge the Government to avoid taking that as any kind of endorsement of its policies more generally.

**The Presiding Officer:** I call Douglas Lumsden to speak for up to four minutes, please.

17:02

**Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con):** Last year, my colleague Maurice Golden closed the same debate for the Conservative Party. In that debate, he commented that:

“There are usually two certainties with a Scottish budget—taxes going up and a pantomime from the Greens, pretending that they might not support it.”—[*Official Report*, 25 February 2021; c 98.]

Last year, he was pleased that one of those traditions was broken. This year, I am pleased to see that the other one has also been broken. The Greens are no longer a pantomime; instead, they have been fully brought into the circus of this devolved Government, selling local government down the river for a couple of ministerial diesel cars.

As has been said many times, the fact that hard-working, middle-income Scots pay more tax than the rest of the UK is a disgrace. Why should our nurses, teachers, public servants and many more be penalised because of this devolved SNP-Green Government? However, the most disgraceful fact in all this is that all that extra tax that our vital

workers are paying is for nothing—it is of no benefit at all for the Scottish budget.

At the Finance and Public Administration Committee on 14 December 2021, Professor Alasdair Smith of the Scottish Fiscal Commission told us that, if Scottish income tax had not been devolved, taxpayers would be better off by £800 million in 2022-23.

**John Mason:** Douglas Lumsden said, “if ... income tax had not been devolved”.

However, does he accept that, if we had not put the rates to what they were, there would be less money and we would have less money for public services and have to cut them?

**Douglas Lumsden:** I am tackling that point, Mr Mason. The whole point is that, if the tax had not been devolved, our taxpayers would have £800 million back in their pockets. That point was made not by me but by Professor Alasdair Smith. It is about having £800 million back in the pockets of hard-working taxpayers, back in our economy and back being spent on our high streets. Tomorrow, we have Labour’s debate on the cost of living. Think how much better it would be to have that money back with families right across Scotland.

Before anyone says that that £800 million is more for the Scottish Government to spend, I am afraid to report that that is not the case. Because our economic performance is lagging behind that of the rest of the UK, that extra taxation is simply to plug the gap in our economic divergence. Alex Cole-Hamilton pointed that out in his contribution.

To be fair, that is not the fault of devolved taxation; it is the fault of the devolved SNP Government and its economic incompetence. The SNP gambled that the Scottish economy would grow faster than the rest of the UK’s. It gambled that oil and gas would pay a pivotal role in economic growth, but then it got in bed with the Greens. The First Minister went for some selfies at the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26—and she turned her back on the oil and gas industry in the north-east. The SNP gambled with millions of taxpayers’ hard-earned cash—and lost.

In 2017, Nicola Sturgeon said:

“I have been very clear that the Government will not increase income tax rates. At a time of rising inflation and pressure on household incomes—especially low incomes—that would not be the right thing to do.”—[*Official Report*, 2 February 2017; c 10.]

Yet middle-income taxpayers right across Scotland are paying more—much more.

The minister said that he has been talking to businesses.

**Tom Arthur:** Will the member give way?



**Douglas Lumsden:** No, I am going to quote the minister first. He said that businesses want “certainty and stability”. I hope that the minister can listen to them. Maybe the threat of another divisive referendum will be taken off the table, to give businesses the certainty that they desire. I will give way.

**The Presiding Officer:** Mr Lumsden, you are in your last five seconds. Would you like to conclude?

**Douglas Lumsden:** I thought that I had more time.

The Government should be focusing on investing in our local government and the preventative measures that it is at the forefront of delivering. The Government should be investing in infrastructure, not making cuts. It should be protecting the energy industry and helping it to make the transition to renewable energy. It should be levelling up and not levelling down. The SNP-Green Government should be focused on growing our economy.

**The Presiding Officer:** Please conclude.

**Douglas Lumsden:** Instead, we are at risk of driving away talent, jobs and investment—all things that, post-pandemic, we desperately need in Scotland.

17:06

**Tom Arthur:** I thank members for their contributions. I note that several members commented on the substance and tenor of the debate and said that it was a mature debate. As an MSP taking part in any debate, I am always conscious that there is an inverse relationship between the substance of a debate and its appeal to sketch writers, so I commend Mr Lumsden for trying to give them something to write about.

I want to say something very briefly to Mr Lumsden. We need a mature debate. One of the places where that has to start is on the definition of “middle-income earners”. The majority of people paying income tax in Scotland—

**Douglas Lumsden:** Will the member give way?

**Tom Arthur:** I will certainly give way if Mr Lumsden wants to give me the precise definition, from a Conservative perspective, of what a middle-income earner is.

**Douglas Lumsden:** On that point, the minister surely thinks that teachers and nurses should be higher-rate taxpayers, because they are paying more tax under the devolved tax system.

**Tom Arthur:** Does the member want another bite at the cherry? He should give me a number. What is the salary of a middle-income earner in

Scotland? Does he want to stand up and tell us that?

**Douglas Lumsden:** I could do this all day. Once again, we hear that teachers should be higher-rate taxpayers. We have nurses paying more tax under this devolved Government.

**Tom Arthur:** Does that not reveal how out of touch the Conservative Party is? The reality is that the vast majority—54 per cent—of people in Scotland who pay income tax will be paying less income tax than they would elsewhere in the UK, and teachers, nurses and doctors here, unlike their UK counterparts, are not saddled with student loan debts of tens of thousands of pounds. I would just make that point very clear to the member.

In all seriousness, a range of points were made in the debate. One that many members kept coming back to was about SFC forecasts. If time allowed, I would be more than happy to raise some of the other points that members raised today, but I think that that was the central one. Members were absolutely right to express concerns about the SFC’s latest income tax forecasts. It is important to remember that they are independent forecasts and, of course, the SFC is best placed to explain its judgment in detail, but I would like to highlight a number of important factors that members should be aware of. Both the SFC and the Office for Budget Responsibility have previously warned that the continued uncertainty around the pandemic means that there is a significant risk that we will see greater volatility in the forecasts. Michelle Thomson picked up on that.

Furthermore, the negative net position forecast for income tax is partly driven by different judgments that the SFC and the Office for Budget Responsibility take on the outlook for the Scottish and UK economies. The OBR’s forecast of UK income tax receipts also includes the effects of the UK Government’s decision to freeze UK income tax bands until 2025-26, whereas the SFC assumes that Scottish income tax bands will increase in line with inflation.

**Liz Smith:** The minister quotes the Scottish Fiscal Commission, and we could go on to talk about the Fraser of Allander Institute and other economic forecasters. The Finance and Public Administration Committee described the economic underperformance as “deeply worrying”. That is the biggest concern, and that is surely one of the issues that the Scottish Government has to address.

**Tom Arthur:** It is important to look at the reality of Scotland’s economic performance under this Government. Our gross domestic product is back to pre-pandemic levels—and the latest statistics

show that that is broad based. In December, the Scottish Fiscal Commission forecast growth in the Scottish economy of 6.7 per cent in 2021 and 3.8 per cent in 2022.

On the labour market, Scotland's unemployment rate is 3.6 per cent, which is lower than the UK rate, according to the latest data. On trade, Scotland is the only part of the UK with a positive trade balance in goods; it exported £4 billion more in goods than it imported in the past year. Scotland has been the top destination in the UK, outside London, for foreign direct investment over the past six years, with Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen appearing in the top 10 UK cities. We have made tremendous progress since coming to power on narrowing the productivity gap between Scotland and the rest of the UK, and we will build on that work through the national strategy for economic transformation.

I recognise that what we have from the SFC, ultimately, are forecasts, which are volatile. Of course we take them seriously, and we are working constructively with business and other partners to build Scotland's recovery from the pandemic and ensure that we have growth that translates into earnings and increased income tax receipts in future.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes the debate.

Rule 11.3.1 requires the question on the Scottish income tax rate resolution 2022-23 to be put immediately after the debate. The question is, that motion S6M-03019, in the name of Tom Arthur, on the Scottish income tax rate resolution 2022-23, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division. I suspend the meeting to allow access to the digital voting system.

17:12

*Meeting suspended.*

17:18

*On resuming—*

**The Presiding Officer:** The question is, that motion S6M-03019, in the name of Tom Arthur, on the Scottish income tax rate resolution 2022-23, be agreed to. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is now closed.

**The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson):** On a point of order, Presiding

Officer. Unfortunately, my voting app is not functioning. I would have voted yes.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Robertson. We will ensure that that is recorded.

**For**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (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)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

#### Abstentions

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (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)  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (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-03019, in the name of Tom Arthur, on the Scottish income tax rate resolution 2022-23, is: For 89, Against 0, Abstentions 29.

#### *Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that, for the purposes of section 11A of the Income Tax Act 2007 (which provides for income tax to be charged at Scottish rates on certain non-savings and non-dividend income of a Scottish taxpayer),

the Scottish rates and limits for the tax year 2022-23 are as follows—

(a) a starter rate of 19%, charged on income up to a limit of £2,162,

(b) the Scottish basic rate is 20%, charged on income above £2,162 and up to a limit of £13,118,

(c) an intermediate rate of 21%, charged on income above £13,118 and up to a limit of £31,092,

(d) a higher rate of 41%, charged on income above £31,092 and up to a limit of £150,000, and

(e) a top rate of 46%, charged on income above £150,000.

## Business Motion

17:20

### The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-03033, 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 8 February 2022

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 Debate: A New Vision for Justice

*followed by* Committee Announcements

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 9 February 2022

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:  
Health and Social Care;  
Social Justice, Housing and Local  
Government

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: Nationality and Borders Bill (UK Legislation)

*followed by* Stage 3 Proceedings: Coronavirus (Discretionary Compensation for Self-isolation) (Scotland) Bill

*followed by* Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Motion: Members' Expenses Scheme

*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 10 February 2022

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

*followed by* Members' Business

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:

Constitution, External Affairs and Culture

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate:  
Professional Qualifications Bill (UK  
Legislation)

*followed by* Stage 3 Proceedings: Budget (Scotland)  
Bill

*followed by* Legislative Consent Motion: Health and  
Care Bill - UK Legislation

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 22 February 2022

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* Delegated Powers and Law Reform  
Committee Debate: Inquiry into the use  
of the made affirmative procedure during  
the Coronavirus pandemic

*followed by* Committee Announcements

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 23 February 2022

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

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

*followed by* Scottish Conservative and Unionist  
Party Business

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.10 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 24 February 2022

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

*followed by* Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:  
Education and Skills

*followed by* Net Zero, Energy and Transport  
Committee Debate: COP26 - Outcomes  
and Implications for Scotland's Climate  
Change Policies

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 7 February 2022, 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

17:21

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):**

The next item of business is consideration of three Parliamentary Bureau motions, and I ask George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motion S6M-03034, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, and motions S6M-03035 and S6M-03036, on designation of lead committees.

*Motions moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Redress for Survivors (Historical Child Abuse in Care) (Reconsideration and Review of Determinations) (Scotland) Regulations 2022 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the COVID-19 Recovery Committee be designated as the lead committee, and that the Criminal Justice Committee and Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee be designated as secondary committees, in consideration of the Coronavirus (Recovery and Reform) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

That the Parliament agrees that the Economy and Fair Work Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the supplementary legislative consent memorandum in relation to the Professional Qualifications Bill (UK Legislation).—[George Adam]

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

## Decision Time

17:21

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):**

There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S6M-03018.2, in the name of Miles Briggs, which seeks to amend motion S6M-03018, in the name of Shona Robison, on prevention of homelessness duties, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

The vote is closed.

**Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app froze and I would have voted yes.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Hoy. We will ensure that that is recorded.

**The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My voting app is still not functioning and I would have voted no.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Robertson. We will ensure that that is recorded.

**Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** I had an issue with my app; I would have voted yes.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Ms Hamilton. We will ensure that that is recorded.

### For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)

Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

### 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)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)

Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S6M-3018.2, in the name of Miles Briggs, is: For 51, Against 68, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The question is, that amendment S6M-03018.1, in the name of Mark Griffin, which seeks to amend motion S6M-03018, in the name of Shona Robison, on prevention of homelessness duties, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

The vote is closed.

**Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I lost connectivity. I would have voted no.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Greer. We will ensure that that is recorded.

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** My app disconnected. I would have voted yes.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Whittle. We will ensure that that is recorded.

**Angus Robertson:** My voting app is still not functioning. I would have voted no.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Robertson. We will ensure that that is recorded.

**For**

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)

Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

**Against**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)

Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S6M-03018.1, in the name of Mark Griffin, is: For 51, Against 68, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The question is, that motion S6M-03018, in the name of Shona Robison, on prevention of homelessness duties, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament welcomes the publication of the joint Scottish Government and COSLA consultation on Prevention of Homelessness duties, which seeks views on ambitious plans to strengthen the rights of people experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, homelessness in Scotland; supports the principles as informed by the final report of the Prevention Review Group, which include a shared public responsibility to prevent homelessness; notes

that the package of measures in the consultation includes the introduction of new legal duties on public bodies and landlords to “ask and act” on any risk of homelessness, changes to existing homelessness legislation to prioritise early intervention, and maximising the housing options available to people; recognises that approaches to preventing homelessness should be person centred and trauma informed, and agrees that this approach will support the implementation of the human right of an adequate home for all.

**The Presiding Officer:** I propose to ask a single question on three Parliamentary Bureau motions. As no member objects, the final question is, that motions S6M-03034, S6M-03035 and S6M-03036, in the name of George Adam, be agreed to.

*Motions agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Redress for Survivors (Historical Child Abuse in Care) (Reconsideration and Review of Determinations) (Scotland) Regulations 2022 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the COVID-19 Recovery Committee be designated as the lead committee, and that the Criminal Justice Committee and Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee be designated as secondary committees, in consideration of the Coronavirus (Recovery and Reform) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

That the Parliament agrees that the Economy and Fair Work Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the supplementary legislative consent memorandum in relation to the Professional Qualifications Bill (UK Legislation).

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



## Storm Arwen (Response in Stirling) and Resilience Planning

**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-02784, in the name of Evelyn Tweed, on the response to storm Arwen in Stirling and future resilience planning. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament acknowledges the hard work and assistance given by communities and organisations during the emergency situation caused by Storm Arwen; recognises that the Storm was reportedly four times more damaging than the Beast from the East in February 2018, and led to large areas of rural Stirling being without electricity, phone signal and in some cases water, for up to a week, in November 2021; congratulates communities across Stirling for pulling together and ensuring that the most vulnerable were cared for despite the incredibly difficult circumstances; acknowledges the response from Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks and what it sees as the company's great efforts to reconnect homes and businesses as quickly as possible, despite the widespread damage to the network; commends Scottish Water for the rescheduling of works in Callander to ensure roads remained open throughout the emergency; further commends Stirling Council, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, Police Scotland, Killin Mountain Rescue Team, Trossachs Search and Rescue, International Rescue Corps, British Red Cross, and local businesses across Stirling, for their response to Storm Arwen, and notes the view that action must be taken to review resilience planning and ensure communities across Scotland have confidence that resilience against future storms and emergencies is robust.

17:31

**Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP):** First, I declare an interest as I am an elected member of Stirling Council.

Storm Arwen was one of the worst recent storms in this country. In parts of my constituency, winds reached 96mph, and the storm was much more damaging than the beast from the east. My office and I were inundated with requests for help and assistance, with those who contacted us ranging from people with critical medical needs to others who were concerned about loved ones who were unreachable.

Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks estimates that 135,000 homes lost power, and that a quarter waited for 48 hours or more before being reconnected. Some homes in rural Stirling were reconnected only after seven days, while others across Scotland waited longer. That length of time

off supply is unacceptable, and I thank every member who is in the chamber today to try to improve the response to such incidents.

SSEN is part of Scottish and Southern Energy, which is a multinational energy company and a member of the FTSE 100. We should remember that SSE is the product of a merger of two energy companies that were formerly publicly owned, and which were both privatised in the 1990s in the ideologically driven deregulation of the energy market. In 1943, the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board was formed to provide electricity to the Highlands. Scores of hydro dams and power stations were built across beautiful, but incredibly challenging, terrain in order to improve lives in Scotland dramatically. In 1948, the Southern Electricity Board was created in southern England. That investment was made by the public sector because no private business could see that there was any profit to be made in providing power to those areas.

The profits of the privatised utility companies, which should have gone into improving services, have since been diverted into generating dividends for shareholders and paying eye-watering director salaries. Last year, SSE's operating profits were up by 7 per cent, to—wait for it—£1.5 billion. The chief executive of SSE earns a basic salary approaching £1 million and, with bonuses and other payments, his total remuneration package last year was more than £3 million. Other directors of the company earned well over £1.5 million each.

Perhaps if more of the company's annual £1.5 billion profits had been diverted into creating better infrastructure, employing more local staff and putting in place better-resourced and better-tested resilience plans, this debate would not have been required.

I carried out a survey of residents who were affected by the storm in my area. The top issues that were raised with regard to SSEN were as follows. People could not get through to the SSEN hotline and, when they did, they were given incorrect information. SSEN did not publicise quickly enough how claims could be made for compensation for the costs of food and alternative accommodation when consumers were cut off for days on end. SSEN's vulnerable-persons list relied on phone connections, which were knocked out by the storm and the subsequent lack of power. Other information was given via social media and text message, which, again, was useless where people had no internet or mobile signal.

One constituent wrote,

"Communication from SSEN was at best misleading and inaccurate"

and

“at worst non-existent ... My 97-year old neighbour was totally and utterly forgotten about. We looked after her in the best way we could, but if we hadn’t, she would have been left cold and alone without food and I doubt would have survived.”

My survey found that there was a lack of confidence in the resilience planning by both SSEN and the local authority. For example, a manager of a care home with 18 vulnerable adults wrote to say that the home had

“had zero contact from any local authorities or the energy company. We had to move them all to a hotel which was extremely difficult ... Thankfully our staff team worked around the clock. But very disappointed that no one even contacted us to see if we were ok.”

I must make it clear, however, that there was very positive feedback for the staff of SSEN and Stirling Council, who worked hard in very difficult circumstances—

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** Will the member give way on that point?

**Evelyn Tweed:** I will, Mr Kerr.

**Stephen Kerr:** I congratulate Evelyn Tweed on securing the debate, but I note that we should pay tribute to the front-line workers of Stirling Council. Like Evelyn Tweed, I am a resident of the Stirling Council area. We should pay tribute to those workers, but at the same time we should highlight the fact that the energy companies were incredibly poor at helping to pinpoint which households had power cuts, which meant that the help that the local authority wanted to offer was not able to be delivered expeditiously.

**Evelyn Tweed:** I had actually made that point.

**Stephen Kerr:** I am sorry—I did not hear it.

**Evelyn Tweed:** I am sorry that you did not hear it. I will go on to make the same point at the end of my speech too, but I thank you for your intervention.

I welcome the 15 recommendations of the storm Arwen review that was undertaken for the Scottish Government and its partners, which were published last week. It is great that the review highlighted the vital role of volunteers and community groups, and the intention to bring those groups into the heart of local resilience planning. I thank the countless volunteers across Stirling, and Scotland, for their dedication and selfless efforts to help others directly when they needed it most.

I also thank staff from Stirling Council; the emergency services; the Killin Mountain Rescue Team; the Trossachs Search and Rescue Team; the International Rescue Corps; the British Red Cross and local businesses across Stirling for their efforts.

**Stephen Kerr:** I hear your point now.

**Evelyn Tweed:** I had actually said it before.

I am sorry that I did not say that through the chair, Presiding Officer.

I also found the response by Scottish Water to be worthy of praise, and it perhaps offers a lesson for others. At the recent Westminster Scottish Affairs Committee session on storm Arwen, Peter Farrer, Scottish Water’s chief operating officer, said:

“Power supplies were lost to Scottish Water assets that supplied about 1.5 million customers. Fortunately we had proactively turned on our emergency generators prior to the event happening, which protected the majority of ... customers”.

It is perhaps no coincidence that Scottish Water remains in public ownership.

I am concerned that it is expected that the main burden of responding to a failure of a privatised industry should fall on volunteers and cash-strapped local authorities. I will be asking the Scottish Government to contact—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Ms Tweed, could you bring your remarks to a close, please?

**Evelyn Tweed:** Yes, thank you—I am just there.

I will ask the Scottish Government to contact the United Kingdom Government to ensure that Stirling Council and other local authorities across Scotland are directly financially compensated by SSEN for having to fill in the gaps in its woeful response.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Claire Baker, who is joining us remotely. She has a prior engagement but is keen to participate in the debate; I am quite happy with that.

17:41

**Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** Thank you for your understanding, Presiding Officer. I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate on storm Arwen and future resilience planning, and I thank Evelyn Tweed for bringing the debate to the chamber.

We cannot debate this subject without mentioning the impacts of storm Malik and storm Corrie, which are still being felt in parts of the country. Thousands of homes have again been left without power—some of them are still to be reconnected—and schools remain closed. Rural businesses that are only just emerging from the pandemic have now been hit again. There has also been a tragic loss of life this weekend as a result of the storms, and my thoughts are with the families that have been affected.

As with the response to storm Arwen, committees and organisations should be praised

for the hard work and support that they have provided, and the efforts to reconnect homes and businesses as quickly as possible are welcome. Nevertheless, the weekend's events serve only to underline the importance of resilience planning and the need to ensure that our communities are prepared to deal with storms and other emergencies.

The Scottish Government's commitment to review the preparations for, and response to, storm Arwen was welcome. We know about the disruption that the storm caused to infrastructure, the power supply, education, travel, air services and the environment, in addition to causing loss of life for a driver in Aberdeenshire. Amid the talk of Arwen being an exceptional storm, we need to recognise that weather events like it, and like storms Corrie and Malik, are part of our lives in the changing environment that we continue to inhabit and have an impact on. We must learn from exceptional storms, as we must from the pandemic, and ensure that we are better prepared for the next time.

We should remember that storm Arwen was not unforeseen. It was forecast, but communities were not adequately equipped to respond. Part of our response has to address that aspect and improve on it. Resilience arrangements must always be evolving and improving, and communities must be kept up to date with them. When extreme weather is forecast, we need to maximise the communication routes that are available before it hits, and we need to ensure that people know where to go for help and whom they can contact.

When we talk about storms hitting a community, we know that that means not only power lines and roads but households, families and individuals. After the Deputy First Minister's statement on storm Arwen, I asked him about the response in Stirling. I had received reports of people being left in freezing temperatures, with no rest centres open and no access to generators. Although for some people there was a swift local response with food, information and support available, for others, support was inadequate and they felt abandoned.

The recommendation from the Government's review of storm Arwen to prioritise assistance to the vulnerable is welcome, but we cannot always predict who will be in need. The review acknowledges the important point that storm damage can make anyone vulnerable if they are without power, heat or food or are cut off by geography or from communication. Most people would find it difficult to deal with such circumstances, and we need to find ways to quickly assess who needs support and how to get it to them.

Communication is a key aspect of any response but, without power, options are quickly limited. The review recommends that

"subgroups of ... Resilience Partnerships should review and test ... plans"

and

"include ... more traditional means of communicating".

We need clear information to be provided in advance where possible, and local networks can be part of that. We should also look at how to utilise existing community groups as part of our response. Throughout the pandemic, there has been a strong community response, and support networks have developed. We should be able to activate such networks in response to events such as storm Arwen.

I recognise the duty on statutory authorities to respond to emergencies. I also recognise Evelyn Tweed's comments about the responsibilities of energy companies. However, a key recommendation in the review is to improve the integration of community and voluntary sector groups into resilience planning. Local groups are often best placed to respond quickly, and they should be resourced and supported to do so as part of a co-ordinated process. It is crucial that the review is now put into action. As we have seen this weekend, the matter is in need of urgent attention.

17:45

**Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP):** I thank Evelyn Tweed for securing the debate, which is of great importance to the people I represent in Aberdeenshire.

Last week, the Scottish Government published a resilience review into how storm impact is managed between the Government, local authorities and energy providers. It is a welcome report. I think that I was the first to call for it in the chamber, probably straight after storm Arwen, which devastated my constituency, if truth be told.

The impact of the storm is still felt and, of course, my constituency has been severely impacted by not one but a further two storms over the weekend. Some homes still remain without power. Over this week, thousands of families, businesses and communities have been left without power and phone signal, so they cannot even communicate. There has been a bit of confusing messaging from SSEN about when they can expect their power to return.

However, it will be of the utmost importance in future that SSEN makes it clear how suitable the current infrastructure is and how we can ensure better resilience next winter and beyond. I refer to the resilience not only of the communities and the

response but of the infrastructure, which needs to be much more robust if it is to withstand the extreme weather that we get in my part of the country.

I associate myself with Evelyn Tweed's points about SSEN's responsibility to invest in that infrastructure and, in particular, the company's response to vulnerable customers. SSEN has a priority list, which seems to me, from the contacts that I have had from my constituents, to be not much more than token. Some of my constituents who have family members on medical equipment that they need to keep going struggled to get additional help.

A few recommendations in the storm Arwen resilience review stuck out for me. The first was about how information was relayed to the public. Many of us in this digital age use our mobile phones to access basic information. However, many mobile services were down and there was no way for people to access information. There was a resilience effort and community groups and volunteers were out providing services and help for people, but people did not know about that.

I was pleased that there was a recommendation for local radio to work more with the local authorities to get information out. Most households still have a battery-operated radio somewhere but, if they did not have one already, they might go out and get one for emergencies if they thought that it was going to be the conduit for information in the future.

I will talk about the contribution and response of the community during storm Arwen and over this weekend and highlight some of the community groups and organisations from Aberdeenshire East that went above and beyond when the storms impacted us.

I put on record my thanks to the Rothienorman community association, which provided refuge for residents. The community of Collieston—a windy place at the best of times—also came together to support their neighbours. Following the impact of storm Arwen, that community looks to form its own resilience group so that residents can continue to help each other locally in their time of need. In Potterton, Jenny Nicol and Shuna Jenkins took it upon themselves to set up a community hub. They worked with the council and volunteers to serve hot soup and food, although neither of them had power in their own homes. Many of the volunteers across Aberdeenshire East were without power but still went out and knocked on the doors of our most vulnerable people to see whether they were okay.

That is just a glimpse into my constituency. I thank every volunteer although I cannot name them all. I am proud of the schools, community

centre staff, councillors, the Red Cross and all the community groups that provided support. I thank them for everything that they did. I also thank my constituency team, some of whom did not have power last weekend and after storm Arwen but still managed to get help to my constituents.

17:49

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

I, too, thank Evelyn Tweed for bringing this important debate to the chamber. The ferocity and impact of storm Arwen isolated many communities across the Stirling region and plunged people into a prolonged period without power, water or any means of communication.

Many rural communities across the northern and western areas of the Stirling Council region, including Fintry, Doune and Killin, bore the full brunt of the storm. At such times, the strength of our communities shines through. There were countless individual selfless acts across communities to assist people who were most in need. Volunteer organisations such as Killin Mountain Rescue Team and Trossachs Search and Rescue Team responded immediately, as did many local businesses.

The staff of SSEN, Scottish Water, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and Police Scotland also responded immediately to those in need, and they were backed up by assistance from Stirling Council, International Rescue Corps and British Red Cross. In many instances, without that urgent assistance the consequences for people could have been incredibly serious.

The experience of those local communities during storm Arwen clearly demonstrates that the support that is offered by councils and the Scottish Government can be improved. I therefore welcome the review that the Scottish Government carried out into the response to storm Arwen. However, although it contains some useful initial recommendations, a great deal more work still needs to be done.

I have supported calls for Stirling Council to seek feedback from local communities and I am pleased that the survey and feedback mechanism are now available. Feedback and suggested improvements that come from the people who were directly affected by the storm will be invaluable. They should be the basis for building on the review's initial recommendations. From information that I have received from constituents, I highlight the following key additional points that should be considered by local authorities and the Scottish Government.

When communications are down, the only way to assess a situation is through immediate presence on the ground. Decision making must be

streamlined and resources must be prioritised. For example, mobile generators should be made available and installed at the most critical facilities immediately. That was not always the case during storm Arwen.

In many cases, the traditional land line remains the only working means of communication during a power cut, as Gillian Martin and others have highlighted. Many people in rural locations keep an old-style telephone for that purpose. However, land lines are due to be moved to internet-based connections by 2025. Thought needs to be given to how we will retain the fallback communication capacity that has proved so important on such occasions, because the mobile networks were out for a significant time during storm Arwen and other recent storms.

As for the Government's emergency response, change is needed in how local and central Government use the capacity in our local communities. At present the approach is too cautious. Many people in communities across the Stirling region have the equipment necessary to help with the immediate response. During storm Arwen, a number of local community members helped to clear hundreds of trees and their efforts made a significant difference to how quickly crucial roads could be used.

**Evelyn Tweed:** Does the member agree that SSEN was at fault?

**Dean Lockhart:** I am just coming to that. There were a number of issues with SSEN's overall approach to the storm. I agree with many of the issues that Evelyn Tweed raised about SSEN's response. For example, it was unhelpful to give short forecasts about the time when power would come back on that were not met. That generated unrealistic expectations among the community, which compounded the problem. I fully recognise the challenging circumstances, but more accurate forecasting would be helpful.

I am up against the clock, but my point is that we need a more positive approach that recognises how local communities with the appropriate equipment and experience can bring a huge amount of capacity at a time when official services are unable to cope.

My final point is that the Scottish Government should consider including Forestry and Land Scotland as an official responder organisation. Its extensive forest-road network is a vital asset that could be used to support communities that are cut off when their public road is blocked.

I wind up with a point that other members have made. Our climate is changing and there will be further challenges such as storm Arwen. The best thing we can do is to work together across the UK, Scottish and local Governments to ensure that

different areas of responsibility are considered together and the necessary changes are made.

17:54

**Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** First, I thank Evelyn Tweed for lodging the motion for debate. Storm Arwen has been catastrophic for us in the north-east, causing widespread and extensive damage. So much so that we might never see the return of parts of the landscape in my constituency in my lifetime and possibly that of my children.

On his welcome visit to the north-east in the wake of storm Arwen, the Deputy First Minister stated that it was a storm of an extraordinary scale. It affected most of Scotland, but it affected my constituency of Banffshire and Buchan Coast more acutely. The level of damage that was inflicted on the power network was colossal. Indeed, the level of casework and contact with my office throughout the crisis illustrated that people had suffered enormous hardship. One person from my constituency lost their life. For some, the level of suffering that they experienced was unique and devastating.

We in the office had to down tools on everything that we were working on and go into crisis centre mode straight away by acting as a conduit between Aberdeenshire Council and Moray Council, resilience partnerships, third sector community groups, welfare groups and constituents, and arranging welfare checks, water drops and more. We tried to liaise and assist as much as possible.

The good that can come from social media was evident, for a change, but we also needed boots on the ground to spread the word. We were also in continuous online and telephone communication with the power company and Scottish Water.

I have lodged several motions in Parliament recognising individual organisations and business for their response and help for others in their communities during storm Arwen and storm Barra, and in the days following. Those individuals, businesses and community organisations opened their doors to the public, provided hot food and water, charging points, places to wash clothes and, in some cases, even a place to sleep.

The local humanitarian effort was awe-inspiring and reminiscent of those first days of the pandemic, when the true meaning of "neighbour" was evident. It represented the best of humanity at a time when it was needed in the right places. From the military to the volunteers, as well as the brave engineers and staff of the utility companies, many of whom placed their own lives in jeopardy, each and every one of them is a hero in my mind. This is an experience that I shall never forget, and

I know that that applies to all of us who witnessed so many going that extra mile. Each of them deserves a medal and praise for their unselfish hard work and bravery.

It should give us all hope and a desire to learn lessons and act upon them. On that point, conversely, the anger and frustration of constituents, the seeming underinvestment in our energy infrastructure in private hands, and the drip, drip of messages about missed deadlines and delays to reinstating power, creating hope and then dismay among many in the dark cold, including the elderly and the vulnerable, are matters of on-going concern and are among a long list of issues that must be addressed. Although we can be eternally grateful for the resilience of local support on the ground, we must reflect seriously on the issues that have been exposed and build on that for our planning for the future.

We must make sure that the resilience arrangements that we have put in place to support people when they go off supply are effective and adequate. I have grave concerns that lessons have not been learned in some regards, not least when SSE changed its policy for support and reduced available compensation at some point between storms Arwen and Barra and the latest storms to hit my constituency hard, Malik and Corrie.

We must hold those with responsibility to account, but I hope that we can do that constructively. I note that, following storm Arwen, SEN has committed an additional £500,000 to its resilient communities fund to help communities to become more resilient in the face of storms, severe weather and prolonged power interruptions. I look forward to discussing exactly how that will be implemented, and when, and I hope that it is just a start and that the rest will be proportional to profit.

We will face more extreme weather because of our climate emergency, and what we do now will lay the foundations for the future. We must ensure that we can weather the storms together.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Due to the number of members who wish to speak in the debate, I am minded to accept a motion without notice, under rule 8.14.3, to extend the debate by up to 30 minutes. I invite Ms Tweed to move the motion.

*Motion moved,*

That, under Rule 8.14.3, the debate be extended by up to 30 minutes.—[*Evelyn Tweed*]

*Motion agreed to.*

18:00

**Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife (Green)):** I thank Evelyn Tweed for bringing the debate to the chamber. I enjoyed her speech, especially her deconstruction of electricity market deregulation and the impacts that it has had on investment.

One of the most surprising aspects of storm Arwen was the arbitrary nature of how it hit Scotland. Although parts of the Stirling area were less affected, there were pockets of destruction, particularly in the area between Doune and Callander, where there was a huge amount of devastation. I remember going to look at the Wood of Doune the morning after the storm. It did not look as though a storm had hit it; it looked as though a twister had hit it. It is just a small area, but it was absolutely devastated. Many communities that live alongside the River Teith were affected and had power outages for many days.

We saw such environmental destruction across Scotland. I learned only recently that 800 seal pups were killed in the storm at St Abbs in East Lothian, and that an area of forestry the size of Dundee was flattened. Therefore, it is welcome that the Scottish Government has conducted an early review. I look forward to progress against the recommendations on lessons learned being reported to Parliament in June. I also welcome initiatives to engage with people who were affected by the storm on their experiences—in particular, I welcome Stirling Council's use of its Engage Stirling website. I was interested to hear of Evelyn Tweed's work to reach out to people in her constituency in an effort to understand how things could be done better.

I would like to focus on a couple of the recommendations from the Scottish Government's review. One that struck a chord with me and many of my constituents was the recommendation about the need for better assessment and communication of restoration timelines. The power companies certainly had an extremely challenging situation to deal with. They had to deal with a succession of faults—they would fix one fault, put the power back on and it would trigger another fault down the line and they would be back to square 1 again.

However, the companies were not great at communicating when power lines would be fixed; they created an expectation among householders that it would happen within a couple of hours. People who used the app or the customer phone lines often got contradictory information about when energy would be restored. As the storm and its effects stretched from a couple of hours into days, it was clear that restoration deadlines were

being missed and that power was not going to be restored for some time.

The power companies were also poor at communicating what compensation was available, which made it difficult for people to plan ahead. In such situations, householders need information that allows them not only to hope for the best, but to plan for the worst. I know that it is hard for the power companies to provide such information, but there needs to be a balance. They must not create an expectation that everything will be sorted in a few hours when it is clear that there are more significant problems that people need to plan how to deal with.

Another recommendation from the review is that processes for identifying those who are most at risk be improved. In Stirling, it is not clear that any door-to-door checks for the most vulnerable people took place. We really need to get a handle on that and ensure that there is consistency across Scotland.

**Evelyn Tweed:** I can inform Mark Ruskell that the council organised checks with voluntary groups.

**Mark Ruskell:** That is good to hear, but we need to ensure that there is consistency within council areas and across Scotland. There is probably room for improvement, there.

Another recommendation was around the need for better voluntary sector partnerships. We need to understand what capacity exists in our community and we need to build that into resilience plans. My community—I was staying in Deanston at the time—started to gather blankets and food in order to set up its own welfare facility. It was not aware that another facility was being set up down the road in Doune. Better planning and training are needed.

I thank all the people who helped to restore power and to support communities. With climate change, we are going to see far more events like storm Arwen. The only silver lining is that we will, as a result, end up with stronger and more resilient communities.

18:04

**Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** I thank Evelyn Tweed for lodging her motion. I do not represent the Stirling area, but I recognise the issues in Evelyn Tweed's motion and in the speeches that we have heard in relation to the impact of storm Arwen on my South Scotland region.

As Stirling was, the Borders and Dumfries and Galloway were battered by 100mph winds. Tens of thousands of trees were uprooted, many homes were left with no water and huge parts of the

region lost power. At one point, power was lost in 40,000 homes. Therefore, I echo others' thanks to all those who, in such atrocious conditions, assisted in the response to the devastation of the storm—the emergency services, community resilience groups, councils and front-line workers from energy firms who worked to reconnect communities.

However, we know that there were significant failings in the response, in particular from energy firms such as Scottish Power in my area, in terms of information—or, rather, misinformation—that was given to people, many of them vulnerable, who wondered when their homes would have power again. There are also serious questions to answer about the robustness of the network in rural communities. The situation would not have happened in our cities, where the energy network is underground. I await the outcome of the review of the energy networks' response by Ofgem and the UK Government.

I also welcome the Scottish Government's review of its response to the emergency, and I agree with many of its recommendations. However, I think that we need to go further; I will highlight just two areas where we need to do so.

As the review highlights, the statutory responsibilities to manage emergencies in Scotland are set out in the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 (Contingency Planning) (Scotland) Regulations 2005. They place six duties on category 1 responders, and a seventh on local authorities in respect of business continuity. However, over the past 17 years, much has changed in how we respond to emergencies, and building resilience is now key.

In my home area—Dumfries and Galloway—I have seen the growing importance of community resilience groups, and the impressive work by the council in promoting, supporting and harnessing the huge commitment of volunteers in those groups. There are now over 80 such groups, all with community resilience local plans in place, and they really stepped up to the mark during storm Arwen.

However, given that the need for a front-line response will continue to grow as the frequency of such emergencies grows, I wonder whether it is time for the Government, in consultation with local authorities, to consider adding an eighth duty—that councils must promote community resilience, in the same way as they are required to promote business continuity. Crucially, that duty would need to come with funding, and one of my concerns is that current support for councils is not adequate for dealing with the emergencies that they face.

When we face events such as storm Arwen and the Government is asked what financial assistance it will provide to councils, it often announces that it has opened the Bellwin scheme. It sounds impressive at the time, but if we look at the fine print of the scheme—

**Evelyn Tweed:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Colin Smyth:** I will, indeed.

**Evelyn Tweed:** Does the member agree that, in this case, SSEN should be asked for compensation to help councils, given that the issue was down to SSEN?

**Colin Smyth:** Absolutely. SSEN was certainly responsible in the Stirling area, and Scottish Power also obviously failed in Dumfries and Galloway and the Borders. Compensation from the power companies is absolutely crucial. The confusion that exists around what compensation is available to households is another issue that needs to be tackled.

I will come back to the funding that the Scottish Government provides to local authorities for all the emergencies that they face. The problem with the Bellwin scheme is that it covers only what is classed as

“immediate action to safeguard life or property, or to prevent suffering or severe inconvenience”.

That rules out much of what councils face when it comes to costs.

Also, the scheme covers only costs over and above a substantial threshold—in the case of Dumfries and Galloway Council, that was nearly £700,000 in 2021-22, and in the Borders it was over £500,000. I therefore suspect that no council will have received support from Government through the Bellwin scheme as result of storm Arwen. Councils are often forced to look for funding elsewhere. It could come from power companies, but often it is a further ask of Government.

Just weeks before storm Arwen, my region suffered devastating flooding. In Dumfries—the largest town in Scotland that floods regularly but still has no flood protection scheme—the banks of the River Nith burst again. However, Government funding for flood protection schemes is oversubscribed for the next five years.

On the River Annan, two historic footbridges—the Cuthbertson memorial bridge and the Diamond Jubilee bridge—were washed away by the flood. Weeks later, in Drummole, in the west of the region, a 40-foot section of the harbour wall was destroyed by storm Barra. I know that the Deputy First Minister knows those issues very well; he visited Annan to see the damage for himself, and

he told Parliament that the Government was considering what support it could give for reinstatement of the footbridges in Annan and of the harbour wall in Drummole. I hope that the Deputy First Minister and the Government will be true to their word and that funding will be allocated to those communities for the devastating impact of the storms.

In the long term, I hope that we will see additional support to councils and communities for building community resilience and continuing to improve our response to emergencies.

18:10

**Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):** I thank Evelyn Tweed for securing this important members’ business debate. As others have done, I thank our first responders from a vast array of services who put themselves at risk to ensure the safety of others. The impact of the efforts of local authorities and all emergency services and volunteers cannot be overstated. Both Karen Adam and Gillian Martin gave particularly warm tributes to the community spirit in their constituencies, which I certainly echo.

Storm Arwen brought with it a rare red weather warning, and the damage was indeed extreme. Unusual wind patterns from the north made mitigations in our built environment less able to cope and impacted particularly on trees, which do not usually have to sustain winds from that direction. That resulted in levels of devastation that, as many members have mentioned, continue to surprise and shock people across Scotland when they come into contact with it.

Our immediate thoughts in the aftermath of the storm were of the three souls who were lost in it, and our thoughts are with their loved ones. The broader impacts in Scotland were that 80,000 homes were without power and our energy infrastructure simply could not cope. Many of the people who were affected were in my region of North East Scotland, with Aberdeenshire bearing the brunt of the impact.

For too many, the response was unacceptably slow; there is broad agreement among members on that fact. The miscommunication in the following days became deeply frustrating. I echo Mark Ruskell’s comments about the management of expectations by the power companies. That was one of the greatest frustrations when people were trying to cope with the situation and to plan the days ahead to make sure that they had enough food and fuel. Grave mistakes were made in that regard.

On 8 December, almost two weeks after storm Arwen and following storm Barra, which came just after it, I raised an urgent parliamentary question,



because 600 homes and businesses were still without power as winter approached. That is the sort of scale of the longevity of the problem, which I hope the current reviews will continue to deal with. The Parliament was told by the Government that, rightly, the response would be reviewed and that lessons would be learned to improve the reaction to such events in future. We have heard something about that review tonight.

Unfortunately, we did not have to wait long for resilience teams to be needed again, as storms Corrie and Malik last weekend left 118,000 homes without power in Scotland and claimed two lives across the UK. I focus on the realisation that we will have to deal with more of such events in the future and that we have to act now to ensure that we can cope with them. Science tells us that we are to experience more extreme weather events than in the past—there will be more of them, they will be closer together and they will be on a bigger scale than we are used to. We talk about the mitigation of climate change. This is one area in which we have to have adaptation as well so that we adapt our environment and begin to cope.

Colin Smyth touched on issues of infrastructure in his constituency, and on the fact that we have to improve storm defences, in particular for footbridges and the like. The Scottish Government is doing that, but more resource will have to be committed to it. However, we have to start the conversation about the large-scale infrastructure investments that are needed in the grid and energy supply, such as the undergrounding of power infrastructure. That applies to future expansion and to the existing network. I do not underestimate the size of that undertaking—none of us should—but if we are to deal with the reality of climate change and extreme weather events, they will have to feature more prominently in our scenario planning. I hope that the Deputy First Minister will reflect on those matters in his summing up.

I again thank Evelyn Tweed for raising the matter on behalf of her constituents and of all members whose constituents have had to deal with such severe problems in recent months.

18:14

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):** I congratulate Evelyn Tweed on securing this important debate and, as Michael Marra has just said, providing the opportunity for members from across the country to reflect on the implications of the very challenging instances of weather that we have had to face in storms Arwen, Barra, Malik and Corrie. Evelyn Tweed was correct, in her motion and her comments, to pay tribute to the significant contribution that has been made to the

resilience effort by countless communities and community organisations. I will come on to say a little bit more about that.

As members have indicated, in the aftermath of storm Arwen, the Government undertook to review the experience of the handling of the storm. That review was carried out expeditiously by the Government's resilience division, and the report was published last week. It is a comprehensive report, which contains a number of recommendations on how we should address and improve the resilience effort that is in place.

None of that should in any way detract from the enormous efforts of a range of organisations and the staff from power companies who worked in atrocious conditions to restore supply in complex circumstances. I saw that for myself when I visited Gillian Martin's constituency in the north-east of Scotland in the aftermath of storm Arwen. It should also not detract from the efforts of local resilience partnerships and volunteer groups who put in such an effort to improve the situation. However, in all those instances, we must be candid enough to reflect on performance and identify how it could be improved.

Having spent most of my weekend involved in calls and discussions relating to storms Malik and Corrie, I have reflected on the fact that, following storm Arwen, two important factors changed in the handling of storms Malik and Corrie. The first is that resilience partners were notified earlier by the power companies of their identification and recognition of the scale of the challenge. We were therefore clearer, earlier in the handling of storms Malik and Corrie, that we had significant challenges to overcome in the restoration of power supply. In broad headline messaging to members of the public, it was clearer than was the case with storm Arwen that people might be off supply for a long period. That does not help anybody if they are off power, but it allows people to make alternative arrangements, and it commits the power companies to making alternative arrangements to support those individuals.

The second difference is that, as a result of that notification, the local resilience operation that has been put in place has been available more timeously than was the case for storm Arwen. Welfare support, access to hot and warm food, and access to leisure centres for phone charging and showering purposes and for a place to get warm have been more readily and quickly available during storms Malik and Corrie than was the case during storm Arwen.

Those are two areas in which the swift review of storm Arwen has helped us to improve the delivery of the resilience operation to members of the public in the course of the past few days. Having said that, there are important additional areas in

which we must continue to build on the strong foundations that we have for resilience in Scotland. We have well-established and tested resilience arrangements, but we must constantly improve those arrangements because of the nature of the challenges that we are likely to face. Members are right to highlight the fact that crucial tests will be thrown at us by the weather due to changes in the weather systems that are becoming all too familiar.

In her speech and her motion, Evelyn Tweed made particular reference to the role of volunteers and, in particular, the Killin Mountain Rescue Team, the Trossachs Search and Rescue Team and the British Red Cross. I reiterate her thanks to those organisations and many other voluntary organisations—Gillian Martin and Karen Adam also referenced organisations in their constituencies in the north-east of Scotland. Those organisations are making a huge contribution to resolving the difficulties faced by individuals.

Colin Smyth raised an important issue, which I discussed yesterday with the Scottish resilience partnership, about the necessity of communities having the capacity to contribute to resilience efforts. In some communities, that capacity exists and does phenomenally well, but in others it is not so mature. I am therefore interested in Colin Smyth's suggestion of an eighth duty to formalise, perhaps, the role of community capacity building. In saying that, though, I acknowledge the importance of that being adequately created and supported to ensure that it is effective in meeting the needs of individuals in their communities.

A significant issue that Evelyn Tweed talked about extensively is the work of the power companies. Power company staff are working extremely hard in very cold and challenging conditions to restore supplies to people affected by storm Malik and storm Corrie. Before I came into the chamber tonight, I was advised that Scottish Power has restored all supplies and that SSEN is optimistic that it will get very close to restoring full supply by the end of this evening, although it might well be late in the evening before that happens.

I thank those members of staff for all that they are doing and all the communication that is under way. In these circumstances, clarity of communication is essential to alert people to the likely challenges, but it is important to acknowledge that our network must be resilient to meet them, and Mr Smyth and Mr Marra made fair points in that respect. We lost power lines because of the amount of overhead cables that we have, and that issue will have to be resolved by Ofgem in dialogue with the power companies.

I am grateful to Evelyn Tweed for the opportunity to reflect on what has been a very

stormy period in Scottish weather and what have been very challenging circumstances. A huge amount of effort from communities, local resilience partnerships and the power companies has gone into addressing the challenges, but assure Parliament of the Government's determination to lead a process of constant improvement, to build on our strong foundations for resilience and, most of all, to act to remedy the challenges that members of the public face as quickly and as effectively as possible.

*Meeting closed at 18:22.*

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