



OFFICIAL REPORT  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament (Hybrid)

Thursday 24 February 2022

Session 6



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

Information on the Scottish Parliament's copyright policy can be found on the website - [www.parliament.scot](http://www.parliament.scot) or by contacting Public Information on 0131 348 5000

---

## Thursday 24 February 2022

### CONTENTS

	<b>Col.</b>
<b>GENERAL QUESTION TIME</b> .....	1
Island Ferry Services.....	1
Home Insulation Programmes (North East Scotland).....	2
Dentists (National Health Service Patients).....	4
Island Ferry Services.....	5
Fish Processing Industry.....	6
Food Waste (Climate Change).....	7
ME and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome.....	8
Distress Brief Intervention Programme.....	9
<b>FIRST MINISTER'S QUESTION TIME</b> .....	10
National Health Service (Recovery Plan).....	13
"NHS in Scotland 2021".....	16
Renewables Developments (Transmission Charges).....	19
Teachers (Abuse).....	20
Student Poverty.....	20
West Lothian Valneva facility.....	21
Sexual Harassment In Schools.....	21
Covid-19 Protection (Immunocompromised People).....	22
Climate Change Committee Report.....	23
Cabinet (Meetings).....	23
School Assault Allegations (Scottish Borders Council).....	24
Scottish Crofting Commission.....	26
Social Care Provision.....	28
Curling.....	29
Cancer Diagnosis and Treatment.....	30
Peterhead Prison Museum.....	30
<b>TORNES NUCLEAR POWER STATION</b> .....	32
<i>Motion debated—[Craig Hoy].</i>	
Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con).....	32
Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP).....	35
Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con).....	37
Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab).....	39
Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con).....	41
Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab).....	43
The Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport (Michael Matheson).....	45
<b>PORTFOLIO QUESTION TIME</b> .....	49
<b>EDUCATION AND SKILLS</b> .....	49
Teaching Assistants (Recruitment).....	49
Teaching Unions.....	50
Curriculum for Excellence.....	52
Children and Young People (Mental and Emotional Wellbeing).....	53
"Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence: Into the Future".....	54
Scottish Education Exchange Programme.....	56
Education (Net Zero Targets).....	57
Scottish Survey of Literacy and Numeracy.....	58
<b>PORTS</b> .....	60
<i>Statement—[Ivan McKee].</i>	
The Minister for Business, Trade, Tourism and Enterprise (Ivan McKee).....	60
<b>UKRAINE</b> .....	73
<i>Motion moved—[Nicola Sturgeon].</i>	
The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon).....	73
Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con).....	76
Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab).....	79
Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD).....	81

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP) .....	82
Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con) .....	84
Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP) .....	86
Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green) .....	88
Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP) .....	90
Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab) .....	92
Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP) .....	93
Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP) .....	95
Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab) .....	96
Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con) .....	98
The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson) .....	100
<b>PARLIAMENTARY BUREAU MOTION</b> .....	105
<i>Motion moved—[George Adam].</i>	
Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con) .....	105
The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney) .....	106
<b>DECISION TIME</b> .....	109

---

# Scottish Parliament

Thursday 24 February 2022

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

## General Question Time

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

The first item of business is general questions. In order to get in as many people as possible, I would be grateful for short and succinct questions, and responses to match.

### Island Ferry Services

**1. Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reported warnings from residents, business and advocacy groups that the current quality of ferry service represents a real threat to island life. (S6O-00780)

**The Minister for Transport (Jenny Gilruth):** The Scottish Government takes seriously the views of those groups. The aim is to make communities across Scotland, including island and remote mainland communities, attractive places to live, work, bring up families and move to, so that Scotland's population profile provides a platform for sustainable and inclusive economic growth and wellbeing.

The importance of transport links, including ferry services, is fully recognised as a key factor for island communities, to assist individual residents in, for example, their access to services and enjoyment of fundamental human rights.

As part of our commitment to our island and remote communities, the Scottish Government has announced investment of £580 million in ports and vessels to support and improve Scotland's ferry services over the next five years, as part of our wider infrastructure investment plan.

**Paul Sweeney:** Will the minister at least accept that the failure of the shipbuilding programme for Caledonian MacBrayne has played a key part in harming the quality of life for islanders and marginalised communities in Scotland, and will she commit to a national shipbuilding strategy and a continuous shipbuilding programme that is centred around the public sector procurement contract for Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd, in order to build a proper, sustainable shipbuilding

industry in Scotland that will help provide lifeline services for communities in the islands?

**Jenny Gilruth:** I mentioned the investment of £580 million in ports and vessels over the next five years. We are working constructively with key partners on that. This afternoon, I will meet CalMac Ferries. I will also meet island MSPs and the chair of the community board at CalMac.

In 2018-19, we invested in a resilience fund to look at ferry services to ensure that there was future reliability and availability of vessels, which I recognise as a challenge, given an ageing fleet. The member asked me to commit to a national shipbuilding plan. I will not do that in the chamber; however, I am meeting Mr Sweeney later, on a separate issue that relates to my portfolio responsibilities, at which meeting I will be more than happy to discuss that in further detail.

**Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP):** As someone who lives on Islay, I have experienced the vagaries of the ferry service. However, the quality of island life is overwhelmingly positive. Yet again, Labour has cast life on the islands in a negative light, while the Scottish Government is actively taking steps to tackle depopulation throughout the islands. Does the minister therefore share my view that that latest example of Labour rhetoric, which may potentially discourage people who are considering moving to the islands, is both entirely partisan and extremely unhelpful in the image that it portrays?

**The Presiding Officer:** Be brief, minister.

**Jenny Gilruth:** We need to make our islands attractive places to live in, as Jenni Minto has alluded to. She lives on Islay, so she recognises some of the challenges, more so than I. However, there have been extended periods of extreme weather, recently, which have directly impacted on the viability of a number of services. As I mentioned to Mr Sweeney, I will be speaking to CalMac about those issues later today—as I will to Ms Minto and a number of other colleagues who represent island communities. It is absolutely essential that we get those services right for the people who live in our island communities.

### Home Insulation Programmes (North East Scotland)

**2. Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the roll-out of the home insulation programmes in the north-east. (S6O-00781)

**The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights (Patrick Harvie):** In the financial year 2022-23, we will invest £336 million in our heat, energy efficiency and fuel poverty programmes.

Since 2013, we have allocated £61 million through our area-based schemes to tackle fuel poverty in North East Scotland. Those projects have benefited more than 18,000 fuel-poor households. Vulnerable families in the north-east will also benefit from the home insulation delivered through our warmer homes Scotland service, and we continue to provide free and impartial advice through our Home Energy Scotland service, which includes advice about relevant grant and loan schemes to help to meet the costs of improved home insulation.

**Maggie Chapman:** I thank the minister for his response and the information that he provided. Given the cost-of-living crisis that we face, and the significant role of rising energy bills in that, can he outline how the Scottish Government can maximise insulation and other measures to keep bills as low as possible, and what more we can and should all be doing in the longer term to tackle issues in the retrofit supply chain?

**Patrick Harvie:** The heat in buildings strategy, which we published recently, goes into those issues in great depth. The strategy has to be seen in the new context of the cost-of-living crisis. The Scottish Government is doing what it can to support people through the current cost-of-living crisis in a broader sense, including through our winter support fund and other aspects of our social security spending, which go beyond the resources allocated by the United Kingdom Government.

On the longer-term development of the supply chain, we believe that there are some 16,400 good-quality jobs for Scotland that can be created through the zero-emissions heating agenda. That will go hand in hand with the regulatory approach that we are taking to make sure that all housing, in all tenures, achieves a good band of energy performance, as well as conversion to zero-emissions heating.

**Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** In December, I asked what the best and most cost-effective way was to insulate traditional granite homes, such as are found in the north-east, in Aberdeen. The minister responded that Aberdeen home owners could install solid wall insulation and suggested that loans of up to £10,000 were available.

I assume that the minister researched the answer before giving it, so can he give me an indicative ball-park price for installing solid wall insulation in a traditional granite home in Aberdeen? Given the extreme disruption and building work required, how long, roughly, does it take?

**Patrick Harvie:** I am afraid that I do not have that precise data with me at the moment, but I will

write to the member and see whether we can answer the question in detail.

#### **Dentists (National Health Service Patients)**

3. **Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what steps it can take to encourage dentists to continue treating national health service patients. (S6O-00782)

**The Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport (Maree Todd):** We are doing everything that we can to support NHS dentistry and we will put patients at the centre of a sustainable public service. We are rapidly moving forward with NHS dental recovery and aim to return to more normal levels of activity as soon as infection prevention and control restrictions allow.

**Colin Smyth:** I thank the minister for that answer, but it was not clear what support the Government is providing. Does the minister understand why a third of dentists who were surveyed by the British Dental Association are considering leaving the profession, despite what the Government said? Every day, I have constituents who are being told, for example, that they have to wait months for NHS treatment, when they could get the same treatment in days if they go private.

Does the minister accept that, in the short term, reducing Covid support will exacerbate the problem and, in the long term, it is clear that the model is broken and we need a comprehensive review of dental services, with far greater integration with our NHS?

**Maree Todd:** In the short term, we need to focus on recovery. We need to get more patients seen by more dentists. In the longer term, I do not disagree; I think that there is a need for reform.

I would dispute that there has not been good support. I will reiterate, as I did in the chamber yesterday, that we are looking at a 9 per cent increase in the budget for NHS dental services this year. Just this month, there has been an additional sum of £20 million through increased fees to provide enhanced examinations. We have provided £50 million of support for dentists and £35 million for personal protective equipment. We have provided £5 million for ventilation improvements and £7.5 million for the purchase of new drills. We have also assured the profession that we are not looking at a cliff edge at the end of this year, in terms of withdrawing support; we are looking at a soft landing, where we rejoin the link between financial reward and seeing patients. We need dentists to see more NHS patients.

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** Key to returning NHS dental services is the recruitment and retention of dental nurses. In Orkney, that is proving exceptionally difficult under the current

funding model, with staff even being poached by the public dental service, due to the disparity in pay and conditions. Will the minister agree to look at that specific issue and even at whether dental nurses providing NHS dental services can all be brought under the same pension provision?

**Maree Todd:** I am certainly willing to look at that. The last thing that we would want is the displacement of a problem that is happening in one part of the dental provision to another part. We need the whole dental service to recover. If the member is willing to write to me with the specifics of that inquiry, I will be more than happy to look into it and try to sort it.

### Island Ferry Services

**4. Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government how it plans to ensure that islanders are not left without food supplies due to the reported lack of resilience of the ferry fleet. (S6O-00783)

**The Minister for Transport (Jenny Gilruth):** The Scottish Government works with CalMac Ferries Ltd to ensure that islanders are not left without food supplies and that essential welfare provision is maintained. During periods of disruption, CalMac will assess all the options to maximise available capacity across the network. CalMac will prioritise traffic to ensure that food and other lifeline supplies and services are available on the islands.

**Graham Simpson:** EY's project Neptune report into the flawed tripartite structure for procuring and running ferries has been with Transport Scotland for five months. Will the minister commit to publishing it now and making a statement to Parliament?

**Jenny Gilruth:** I am more than happy to give Mr Simpson that assurance and to make a parliamentary statement.

**Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** Our island communities have always had to contend with bad weather, but fortunately they have not also had to contend with a Tory Government—instead they have had the benefit of a Scottish National Party Government, which has invested more than £2.2 billion in the Clyde and Hebrides and northern isles ferry services, bringing new routes, new vessels, upgraded harbour infrastructure and the roll-out of significantly reduced fares through the road equivalent tariff scheme. Does the minister agree that it is disingenuous and likely to cause undue alarm for Mr Simpson to suggest that the food security of Scotland's island communities is in jeopardy?

**Jenny Gilruth:** In the event of disruption to supplies having an impact on the health or

wellbeing of island residents, we will work with local resilience partnerships and our established multiagency response teams to develop solutions. Our ferry operators, in very difficult circumstances, take every opportunity to exploit those weather windows where they have arisen, with the option of running amended or additional sailings if needed in order to prioritise supplies and to prevent such a situation from arising.

The period of weather disruption that I mentioned previously, combined with some issues with vessel resilience, brings into sharp focus the essential nature of the lifeline connectivity that our ferry services provide to our island communities. That is why Scottish ministers have committed to investing £580 million in our ferry infrastructure over the course of the next five years.

### Fish Processing Industry

**5. Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what support is available to ensure that more fish caught by Scottish vessels are landed and processed at Scottish ports. (S6O-00784)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands (Mairi Gougeon):** The Scottish Government is due to introduce amended economic link provisions in January 2023 to help to ensure that greater amounts of quota stocks are landed in Scottish ports. We will also be producing a new seafood trade strategy, which will set out our vision to ensure that Scotland has a thriving, sustainable and diverse Scottish seafood industry that revitalises coastal communities.

Through the marine fund Scotland, £6 million has supported Scottish processing facilities to upgrade their premises and improve automation, to help to enhance the opportunity for Scottish-landed catches to have value added in Scotland.

**Karen Adam:** The Scottish Government has a strong track record of supporting the fishing industry on the Banffshire and Buchan coast, most recently with the additional £1.8 million of funding for ports and harbours, which was announced last year, which benefited Fraserburgh, Peterhead and Macduff.

However, given that Scotland is entitled to receive at least £62 million annually to replace the European maritime and fisheries fund, can the cabinet secretary tell us what impact Brexit has had on funding for the vital projects and infrastructure that support our fishing communities, such as those in my constituency?

**Mairi Gougeon:** The impact of Brexit has been significant, not only because of the losses and dislocation of markets, but also because of the reduction in quota available for Scottish vessels. The member is right in what she has said.

Following EU exit, we provided clear evidence to the UK Government for a multi-year allocation for marine funding of £62 million per annum, given that that is what we could have accessed as an EU member. However, instead, the UK Government has allocated only £14 million a year to Scotland. That fails to recognise the value and importance of Scotland's seas.

In addition, it appears that the yearly £5.5 million top-up that was previously provided to Scotland on the basis that the EU maritime and fisheries fund allocation was insufficient will not continue. That means that, in real terms, the funding available to support the seafood sectors, enhance the marine environment and improve biodiversity has received a 28 per cent cut compared with that in the previous three years.

Ultimately, a reduced funding pot means that there is reduced opportunity to realise the benefits for coastal communities, marine businesses and the marine environment in Scotland. However, we will continue to use the limited funding that we have to deliver maximum effect through the marine fund Scotland.

#### **Food Waste (Climate Change)**

**6. Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to reduce any adverse effects of food waste on climate change. (S6O-00785)

**The Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity (Lorna Slater):** The Scottish Government's 2019 "Food Waste Reduction Action Plan" set a target of a 33 per cent reduction in food waste by 2025. The delivery of that plan is on-going and is supported by Zero Waste Scotland.

I am taking action. Yesterday I launched phase 2 of our food waste marketing campaign to highlight links between food waste and climate change, and to encourage people to buy what they need and eat what they buy and recycle food waste that they cannot prevent.

A review of the plan will be published this year. That will identify additional areas of action that are required to meet the 2025 target.

**Brian Whittle:** The minister will be aware that, if food waste were a country, it would be the third largest greenhouse gas emitter behind China and the USA. In fact, food waste contributes four times the amount of greenhouse gas that the global aviation industry does. Does the minister agree that not enough emphasis has been put on tackling food waste and that we must stop vilifying our food producers?

**Lorna Slater:** Brian Whittle is absolutely right that we must not vilify our food producers, that

everybody can work together to tackle food waste, and that food waste is an important contributor to climate emissions.

#### **ME and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome**

**7. Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what steps are being taken to ensure access to care and support planning by a specialist team for people with ME and chronic fatigue syndrome, as recommended by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. (S6O-00786)

**The Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport (Maree Todd):** The Scottish Government welcomes the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guideline on ME and chronic fatigue syndrome, which was published last October. We have commissioned an independent organisation to engage with the third sector, people with lived experience and clinical stakeholders to discuss how we can move forward in implementing the NICE guideline recommendations in Scotland and, on a broader front, identifying and practically addressing priorities for service improvement in care for people with ME/CFS.

I look forward to meeting #MEAction Scotland representatives on 3 March, which is next week, and directly hearing their views on improving the access to care and support for people who are affected by ME/CFS.

**Michelle Thomson:** The emergence of SARS-CoV-2 and all its variants has caused significant damage to people and families throughout Scotland, and we know that ME/CFS can be triggered by infection in patients, although susceptibility may have a genetic element. Does the minister therefore agree that access to care and specialist support is essential for those who are currently diagnosed? What work is being undertaken to identify any lasting effects from Covid infections that may lead to the development of ME/CFS?

**Maree Todd:** We are committed to ensuring that everyone who is living with ME/CFS in Scotland is able to access the best possible care and support and benefit from healthcare services that are safe and effective and put people right at the centre of their care.

Our approach in responding to long Covid is to support national health service boards to develop models of care that will be of benefit to the management of other long-term and complex conditions. Our chief scientist office is supporting nine major research projects through £2.5 million of funding. They are expected to contribute significantly to the clinical knowledge of the long-term effects of Covid-19, including to



understanding more fully the nature of long Covid and possible treatments for it.

#### **Distress Brief Intervention Programme**

**8. Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on how the distress brief intervention programme is supporting people experiencing mental health crises. (S6O-00787)

**The Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care (Kevin Stewart):** The award-winning distress brief intervention programme is a flagship programme that provides personalised compassionate support to people who present to front-line services in emotional distress and do not require emergency clinical services. DBI provides practical support that helps people to understand and manage their distress. As such, it forms a core element of the Government's work on improving responses for people who are experiencing mental health crisis.

**Emma Roddick:** The distress brief intervention programme was, in part, introduced to create a coherent approach to addressing mental health crises. With that in mind, will the minister say what is being done to ensure that access to mental health services is consistent across Scotland, and in particular for those living in rural or island communities?

**Kevin Stewart:** Ms Roddick asks an important question. DBI is available nationally through NHS24. In the Highlands and Islands, Inverness is one of the pilot areas for DBI. The programme is also now available in Moray and Orkney and is expected to go live in Argyll and Bute and in the Western Isles in the spring.

More generally, mental wellbeing support can be accessed through an individual's general practitioner or from NHS24 or the Breathing Space service. Anyone who feels that they might cause immediate harm to themselves can reach out for help by dialling 999.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes general questions.

## **First Minister's Question Time**

12:00

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** Before questions, I invite each party leader to make a short statement on the situation in Ukraine.

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** The Parliament will discuss the unfolding situation in Ukraine later and will express its solidarity with a country whose very existence as an independent democracy is now under attack. However, at this first sitting since Russia's full-scale invasion, I condemn, in the strongest possible terms, the unprovoked imperialist aggression of Vladimir Putin.

There can be no doubt that he must now face the severest of consequences: sanctions on him and his network of oligarchs and agents, and their expulsion from countries across the world; sanctions on his banks and their ability to borrow and function; sanctions on his energy and mineral companies; and, here in the United Kingdom, an immediate clean-up of the swirl of dirty Russian money in the City of London.

Just as Putin must face and feel the wrath of the democratic world, the people of Ukraine must feel and not just hear our support and solidarity. The world must now help and equip Ukraine to defend itself and resist Russian aggression. We must ensure humanitarian aid and assistance and we must all stand ready to offer refuge and sanctuary, where necessary, for those who may be displaced.

This is a critical juncture in history, and perhaps the most dangerous and potentially defining moment since the second world war. We live in this moment, but it is true to say that historic precedents will be set in the hours and days to come. Those will determine the new norms of what is or is not acceptable in our international order.

Putin is an autocrat. His control of the apparatus of state and of the economy, the military and the media can make his power seem impregnable. However, as with most strongman leaders, underneath the veneer of power lie insecurity and fear. There is fear of democracy and of freedom, and fear of the kind of popular uprisings witnessed over recent years in Ukraine ever happening in Russia.

On that point, let us not assume that he is now acting in the name of the Russian people. We must ensure that anti-Putin forces within Russia also have our encouragement and moral support.

Future generations will judge the actions that the world takes in this moment. There are, of

course, many complexities but, at its most fundamental, this is a clash between oppression and autocracy on one hand and freedom and democracy on the other. We must all ensure that freedom and democracy prevail. *[Applause.]*

**Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** The world that we woke up to this morning is a far darker and more unstable place than when we went to sleep last night. I said on Tuesday that the situation in Ukraine was at the forefront of all our minds. Since then, the escalation in the aggression by Russia towards Ukraine confirms that President Putin's only intention was war, no matter what the cost.

The cost will be high. In the first few hours, lives have already been lost and the images of people fleeing the cities of Ukraine and the videos from those who have stayed behind capturing the invasion are difficult for us all to watch. That must be so much more difficult for Ukrainians here in Scotland and across the UK and for anyone with friends, family or loved ones still in the country.

The pain of war is felt by people. Families will lose loved ones and whole communities will be displaced. Children will be left with lifelong scars, both physical and mental. I always thought and hoped that war on this scale in Europe was something that I would know of only through history lessons in school but, sadly, after this morning, it is part of our daily lives once again.

I support the United Kingdom Government and allies around the world in their condemnation of this Russian war and their united efforts to avert further bloodshed. We can only hope and pray that they will succeed. We stand with the people of Ukraine. *[Applause.]*

**Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab):** Today, a hard-won and fragile peace in Europe has been shattered. It is a dark day, and my party and I stand in solidarity with the people of Ukraine. Vladimir Putin's attack on Ukraine is unprovoked and unjustifiable. Across the world today, the message is clear: peace and democracy must prevail, and we will not bend to Vladimir Putin's imperial ambitions.

Our first actions now must be to support the Ukrainian people. In supporting the fight against Russian aggression, we must provide urgent humanitarian assistance to defeat the horrors of war: hunger, destitution and need. The UK must urgently reinforce our North Atlantic Treaty Organization allies; the hardest possible sanctions must be taken against all those who are linked to Putin; and the influence of Russian money and disinformation must be extricated from public and political life in the UK, including here in Scotland.

The message from this Parliament must be loud and clear. We stand in solidarity with the people of

Ukraine. Peace will prevail. Vladimir Putin will pay a heavy price. *[Applause.]*

**The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights (Patrick Harvie):** On behalf of the Scottish Green Party, I offer our solidarity with the people of Ukraine in this moment of crisis.

Ukraine is a sovereign democratic nation whose people have the inalienable right to self-determination. It is a European nation, as its people have made clear by majority, time after time in recent years. Today's escalation of a Russian invasion that started in 2014 is a flagrant and grievous breach of international law, which must be responded to in the most comprehensive terms. No form of sanction should be off the table. Action against Russian state-backed corporations and other entities must be swift, and here in the UK it is essential that we tackle the money-laundering networks that are used extensively by Russian elites.

It now seems inevitable that there will be a significant flow of refugees from Ukraine in the coming days, weeks and months. I trust that Scotland stands ready to play our part to support them in any way that we can. Let us all hope, even at this hour, that a prolonged war can be prevented, as the devastation that that would bring does not bear thinking about.

We are proud to stand with the people and the Government of Ukraine, and I am very pleased that that message is coming from the entire chamber. *[Applause.]*

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** I rise to offer the solidarity of Scottish Liberal Democrats with the people of Ukraine.

We awoke this morning to a much darker world. A few hours ago, for the first time this century, a land war has begun in continental Europe and we have no idea how it will end. The Russian regime has violated the sovereignty of a democratic state, broken international law and threatened the very fabric of peace and security in our world. It is very likely that the invasion will lead to a catastrophic and wholly needless loss of human life. It will displace thousands of Ukrainians, and we must be ready to help.

The city of Kyiv is twinned with the city of Edinburgh. That relationship has to mean something, so we must be prepared to offer all those who are fleeing that conflict safe harbour in the villages and towns of Scotland. Today, the Parliament and all parties in it speak with one voice. We utterly condemn the expansionist aggression of the Russian regime and stand in total solidarity with the people of Ukraine. *[Applause.]*

## National Health Service (Recovery Plan)

### 1. Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands)

**(Con):** Does the First Minister have full confidence in her Government's national health service recovery plan?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** Yes, I do, but the Government will continue to work hard to ensure that the recovery plan continues to develop, evolve and be fit for the purpose of getting the NHS through the remainder of Covid and on to a path not only of recovery but of sustainability for the future.

Audit Scotland has, of course, this morning published its regular review of the NHS. I welcome that report. It is challenging but fair and balanced. The report recognises that the task that all Governments face of recovering their health services from Covid is difficult and that there are no easy answers, but it also fairly recognises the work that the Government and the NHS have done throughout Covid and are doing as we enter into recovery from Covid. It also recognises the plans that the Scottish Government is now implementing with the NHS to ensure sustainability for the future.

**Douglas Ross:** "Yes, I do". Those three simple words from the First Minister confirm that everything that she has put forward in her NHS recovery plan has her backing. It is what she believes to be the way of getting our health service out of the struggles of the pandemic. However, it is a different view from that of Audit Scotland, which gave a damning verdict this morning on the Government's plan to rebuild Scotland's NHS. It states:

"There is not enough detail in the plan to determine whether ambitions can be achieved in the timescales set out."

There is not enough detail in the plan that, moments ago, the First Minister said she is happy with. Will she accept that the recovery plan does not go far enough and urgently needs to be redrafted to address the serious concerns that have been highlighted?

**The First Minister:** No, I do not agree with that. However, I agree—I said this in my initial answer—that the Government must ensure the implementation of that recovery plan and must ensure that it is flexible and adaptable so that it is fit for the very significant challenge that Scotland faces and, indeed, countries across the world face in recovering our health services from the pandemic.

Today's Audit Scotland report is very fair and challenging. People can go and read it for themselves. It also sets out and acknowledges the work that is under way. For example, page 3 of the report says that Scottish Government plans have

"the potential to help the NHS become sustainable".

Later on, the report says:

"The Scottish Government recognises that the risks relating to workforce capacity and wellbeing are significant"

and

"has introduced a range of controls to mitigate"

those risks. It also says that

"The Scottish Government and NHS are implementing lessons learned during the pandemic"

and

"The Scottish Government's plans for the recovery and redesign of NHS services are ambitious",

although it goes on to say that they are "challenging". It further says:

"The NHS has implemented a range of new ways of working to improve access to healthcare services".

That recognises and records the work that is under way.

Finally, I simply note that we are investing record sums in the national health service. I think that it is just over £100 per head more than equivalent investment south of the border, which I think equates to £600 million more being spent on the NHS than would be the case if we followed the investment of the United Kingdom Government. There are also record numbers of people working in our national health service.

I recognise the challenge. It is perhaps one of the biggest challenges that faces us and other Governments, but we are focused on it, the recovery plan will help us to address it and we will continue to ensure that the plan and the resources that back it up are fit for the scale of that challenge.

**Douglas Ross:** I notice that the First Minister picked elements of the report that were positive for her Government but failed to address the substance of my question, which was about the lack of detail—"not enough detail" is in the report—and the lack of clarity on the timescales that need to be met to reach the ambitions that are set out in the plan.

The First Minister also mentioned that there are record numbers of people in the workforce, but the report makes it plain that the recovery plan will fail unless the Government recruits enough people with the right skills. It highlights vacancies being at record highs throughout the health service.

Scotland's NHS staff have gone above and beyond throughout the pandemic to keep the public safe, but they are now stretched to their limit. Today, on top of the damning Audit Scotland publication, there are reports of junior doctors who are exhausted, burnt out and even leaving

Scotland to work in health services elsewhere. How will the First Minister's plan to cut down waiting times achieve the desired outcomes when staff are at breaking point or, worse, preparing to leave our NHS?

**The First Minister:** First, we have record numbers of staff working in our national health service and, of course, those numbers do not include vacancies; they are staff in post. However, we recognise the recruitment challenges and, as Audit Scotland recognises, we are investing in the wellbeing of staff as well as investing heavily in recruitment. Douglas Ross suggested that I had selectively quoted Audit Scotland's report. I am absolutely clear that it is a very challenging report and that it has real lessons for the Scottish Government, but it recognises fairly the work that we have been doing. On the topic of selective quoting, I note that the Audit Scotland report says about staffing that

"the UK's departure from the EU "

will

"further reduce the pool of workers available in future years".

That is another reality that is exacerbating the recruitment challenge, and Douglas Ross might want to reflect on that when he next gets to his feet.

These are big challenges, so we are meeting them with investment and support for staff. With regard to the detail in the recovery plan, the plan sets out our ambitions and the broad plans that we will implement to meet those ambitions. Of course, we have also asked health boards to produce detailed implementation plans, which they will deliver next month, so that the detail of implementation is there and we can scrutinise that and hold them to account.

Nobody should underplay the scale of the challenge that countries everywhere face in getting their health services back on track, but we are supporting the health service with investment, we are supporting staff and we will focus on ensuring that our health service recovers and is firmly on a path to sustainability for the future.

**Douglas Ross:** The Audit Scotland report lays bare that Scotland's NHS is on an emergency footing. New evidence, which was submitted this morning to the Parliament's COVID-19 Recovery Committee, spells out the true cost of this Government's failure. The Royal College of Emergency Medicine has said that delayed accident and emergency admissions in Scotland led to

"over 500 excess deaths in 2021".

Its evidence to the committee this morning states that those avoidable deaths are

"entirely attributable to the delay to admission these patients experienced."

Five hundred lives were lost because the Government did not act early enough, despite receiving warning after warning that Scotland's NHS is in crisis. If the Audit Scotland report is not a wake-up call for the First Minister and her Government, surely those deaths must be.

**The First Minister:** I know that Douglas Ross probably scripted that contribution before he came into the chamber, but anybody who is listening will hear me taking very seriously the Audit Scotland report, the challenge that it poses and the challenges that our NHS faces, which are in common with challenges that health services across the world face. People can go and read the report for themselves; they do not have to take my word or Douglas Ross's word for what it says. However, people will also have heard me set out that the report recognises the work that the Scottish Government is doing. The report rightly questions the detail of that work and says that our ambitions are "challenging" and will take time to deliver. As it always does, the Scottish Government will pay very close attention to the recommendations that the report makes.

I take all the comments about accident and emergency seriously. Of course, the NHS is and has been on an emergency footing. It would have been unthinkable for it not to have been on an emergency footing, given that we have faced the emergency and crisis of a global pandemic. The consequences of that for our NHS and for people who are waiting for care has been severe, and I recognise that. However, if we look at A and E on its own, there are absolutely big challenges for us to confront, but our A and E units are still the best performing anywhere in the United Kingdom and have been for six years in a row. We have invested in staffing in our accident and emergency units and redesigned them to ensure that only those who need emergency care access it in that way, so they get quicker treatment. I do not shy away from the challenges. Recovery of our health service is a massive challenge for us and Governments everywhere, but we are addressing it with resources, support and the absolute focus that people have every right to expect from us.

### "NHS in Scotland 2021"

2. **Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab):** Today's Audit Scotland report, "NHS in Scotland 2021" paints a devastating picture of the state of Scotland's NHS. It details out-of-control waiting times that are "ever-increasing", a workforce that is burnt out and burdened by stress and strain—with 61 per cent of nurses saying that they are thinking of leaving their job because they are undervalued—and a system that is financially

unsustainable. The impact on patients could be devastating. As the report says,

“health conditions will go undetected for longer, leading to potentially worse outcomes for people.”

After 15 years in power, how did it come to this?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** Anas Sarwar is possibly the only person who has not noticed that we have been in a global pandemic for the past two years. I think that people across the country understand the reasons for the pressures that Scotland’s national health service is facing, that England’s, Wales’s and Northern Ireland’s national health services are facing, and that health services across the world are facing.

I take those pressures seriously. The Audit Scotland report has a lot of positive things to say about how the Scottish Government and the national health service responded to the pandemic and how they prepared for this very challenging winter. It recognises the steps that we are taking to put the NHS on that path to sustainability, but it also poses serious and challenging questions for us, as it has every right, and the responsibility, to do.

Anas Sarwar wants to look back over the past 15 years at the NHS, and I am more than happy to do that. For example, if we look at funding of our national health service, we see that, since this Government took office in 2007, funding for the health portfolio has increased by over 90 per cent. Front-line health spending is 3.6 per cent higher per head in Scotland than in England—that is more than £100 per head, as I reckoned earlier on. If we total that up, it is equivalent to £600 million, or 14,000 nurses. Since this Government took office, NHS staffing is up by over 27,000 full-time equivalent staff members, which is an increase of more than 20 per cent, and that does not include vacancies.

We will continue to face up to these very, very real challenges. We will do that with investment, with support and with determination and hope.

**Anas Sarwar:** The First Minister wants to pretend that these problems have all been created by Covid, but that is not true. Scotland’s NHS was in crisis before Covid hit, and that is why we are struggling to recover.

Here is a reminder of what was happening before Covid. The Audit Scotland report on the NHS in 2017 recorded

“a 99 per cent increase in the number of people waiting over 12 weeks”

for an appointment. The Audit Scotland report for 2018 said that NHS Scotland’s “performance continued to decline”. The report for 2019 said that Scotland’s NHS was “financially unsustainable”.

Year after year, there have been the worst reports in the history of devolution. How many more devastating reports does the First Minister need before she acts in the interests of patients and staff?

**The First Minister:** I do not pretend that all of the challenges that our NHS or other health services face are down to Covid. The health service has been facing demographic pressures. It has faced the pressure of a decade of Tory austerity, which actually started under the last Labour Government, in case we forget that point.

On what was happening before Covid, our waiting times improvement plan was making progress—it was reducing the longest waits in our national health service.

Anas Sarwar wants to pretend that Covid has not had a very significant impact, and he somehow wants to pretend that these challenges are unique to Scotland’s national health service. These challenges are being faced everywhere, across the world. This Government is investing more than many other Governments in its health service. We are doing a range of different things to support our health service, and we will continue to do exactly that, for the sake of those who work on the front line but also for the patients who rely on its services.

**Anas Sarwar:** The First Minister’s response is, frankly, nonsense. There are 680,000 people on an NHS waiting list—that is one in eight of the population. That number was 450,000 before the pandemic. The NHS is 1,000 beds short; the First Minister cut beds before the pandemic. It is 3,500 night nurses and midwives short; the First Minister cut training places for nurses and midwives before the pandemic.

Staff and patients are crying out for help, and the First Minister responds with empty rhetoric rather than practical action. This Government has been solely responsible for Scotland’s NHS for 15 years. The result is staff who are burned out and wanting to leave, and patients who are being failed and are languishing on waiting lists. This Scottish National Party Government has put Scotland’s NHS at risk. How can it now be the one to save it?

**The First Minister:** People in Scotland make those verdicts and decide who they trust to steward our national health service through difficult times and on to the path to recovery.

Let me take the two issues that Anas Sarwar has raised. The first is bed numbers. We do have to reflect on the bed numbers that we will need as we come out of the Covid pandemic and face the likely challenges that Covid will present over the years to come, as it, I hope, becomes endemic.

Anas Sarwar is saying, from a sedentary position, that we have cut bed numbers, but bed numbers have been reducing in Scotland and in countries across the world for many years, because of advances in treatment. Many people who used to go into hospital for things such as cataracts now get those treatments on a day-case basis.

Let me remind Anas Sarwar—he can go and check this, as can anybody—that under the last Labour-Liberal Administration in this Parliament bed numbers fell every single year, reflecting that situation. Andy Kerr, who used to be health secretary, used to stand here and make the same argument that I have just made about advances in treatment and technology. Of course, looking ahead we need to address that.

Then look at staffing—look at nurses, for example. I do not underestimate the challenge that our nursing profession works under, but in Scotland we have 8.4 qualified nurses and midwives per 1,000 of population compared with just six in England—that is a 40 per cent higher staffing level of nurses and midwives.

Are there challenges in our national health service that we have to confront and support it through? Absolutely, but we are providing the investment, the support and the focus and determination. That is the trust that the people of Scotland have put in this Government, and we will get on with that job.

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** I will now take supplementary questions.

### Renewables Developments (Transmission Charges)

**Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP):** The First Minister will be aware of the serious impact that exorbitant and unfair transmission charges are having on renewables developments across Scotland. Those charges are particularly punitive for the islands, where developers face higher costs than anywhere else in the United Kingdom to connect to the national grid. What can the Scottish Government do to lobby the United Kingdom Government to reform a system that penalises the very places where the renewables potential is greatest?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** Transmission networks' use of system charges remains a really significant barrier to achieving net zero in Scotland. Indeed, analysis by the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets suggests that by 2040 Scottish renewable and low-carbon generators will be the only ones to pay a wider charge, with all others including gas generators elsewhere in Great Britain, being paid credits. Therefore, it is vital that we move towards identifying and

progressing solutions as quickly as possible. A fundamentally new approach is needed and we will continue to raise that with Ofgem and the UK Government, as we have been doing repeatedly—we will continue to push for a fairer solution that recognises the massive renewables capability of Scotland.

### Teachers (Abuse)

**Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** *The Press and Journal* this week reported a survey showing that nearly half of teachers in Aberdeen are considering quitting after being subjected to “high levels” of physical and verbal abuse. According to the survey, “rarely a day” goes by without assaults or abuse aimed at members of staff. Aberdeen City Council reports a “collaborative and co-operative approach” between it and the unions, but the issue will be nationwide. What is the Government doing, proactively, to stem such appalling abuse of our dedicated and hard-working teachers?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** First, there are increasing numbers of teachers in our schools, thanks to investment provided by this Government. We will continue to support the wellbeing and safety of our teachers, working with local authorities—which are, of course, the employers—to do that. Frankly, all of us, regardless of political differences, should unite to say that any abuse or attacks on teachers or anybody else working in our public sector are completely unacceptable. We should all show complete zero tolerance towards that.

### Student Poverty

**Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab):** Figures released this week by the National Union of Students Scotland show that one in three students are considering dropping out of college or university, one in four were unable to pay their bills in full as a result of financial pressure, and as many as 20 per cent of students from widening access backgrounds were dependent on food banks. Does the First Minister agree that urgent action is needed to address the surge in student poverty here in Scotland, starting with extending the recently announced £150 fuel payment to all students directly? Scotland's young people cannot afford any more excuses from the Government.

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** Yes, I agree that we need to take seriously the financial pressures that students are living under in these very difficult times for many people across the country, and we will do that. We have provided support to students in a range of ways and we will reflect very carefully on the case being made by the NUS at this time. I am proud of the fact that students in Scotland do not have to pay tuition

fees. One of the most important things that this Government has done—in the face of opposition at various times from the Conservatives, Labour and others—is to protect that vital principle of free education in Scotland, and we will always do so.

### **West Lothian Valneva facility**

**Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP):** The announcement this week of an investment of £20 million from Scottish Enterprise for the Valneva facility in West Lothian is great news for jobs in the region. Although the company has not yet achieved final approvals for a Covid vaccine, does the First Minister recognise its potential for management of the pandemic globally?

As the United Kingdom Government previously cancelled its order, does she acknowledge the hard work and determination of the Scottish management of Valneva in helping secure a major European Union vaccine contract, and the contributions of my West Lothian colleagues, Hannah Bardell MP and Angela Constance MSP, in working with minister Ivan McKee to secure that welcome £20 million investment?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I strongly agree with all those points. Valneva's decision to develop and manufacture its Covid vaccine here is extremely welcome, and I pay tribute to the local management for all their efforts. Valneva is a valued contributor to our life sciences sector, and the Livingston facility is a really important asset, developing and manufacturing vaccines for the prevention and treatment of many infectious diseases and supporting high-quality jobs.

The funding package will create employment and drive further research, and I hope that it will underpin Valneva's operations here in Scotland. I want to take this time to recognise the hard work of all those involved for securing that additional investment as vaccine developments take place over the months and years to come.

I take the opportunity to pay tribute to Fiona Hyslop, Angela Constance and Hannah Bardell, who have fought very hard on behalf of that company, and I wish it every success for the future.

### **Sexual Harassment In Schools**

**Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con):** Almost two thirds of pupils in Scottish schools have experienced sexual harassment at, or on their way home from, school. Highlighting guidance around sexual harassment does not go far enough when some pupils are unaware of what is considered sexual harassment. What is the Scottish Government doing to ensure that young people can identify sexual harassment when it happens?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** We should come together to make it clear that harassment or abuse of any form, whether in the workplace, in schools, in the home or in society generally, is completely reprehensible and unacceptable. It is the conduct and behaviour of perpetrators that need to change if we are to end the culture of harassment and abuse.

We want all children and young people to learn tolerance, respect, equality and good citizenship to address and prevent prejudice as well as develop healthy relationships. The gender-based violence working group will consider that report in detail at future meetings. We also provide funding to Rape Crisis Scotland to help deliver its secondary school programmes that aim to tackle sexual harassment and violence.

### **Covid-19 Protection (Immunocompromised People)**

**Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab):** An immunocompromised constituent recently got in touch to say that she has had very little antibody response to the Covid vaccination and is choosing to continue to shield. Consequently, she has not seen her family or friends since the start of the pandemic and has become unemployed, which negatively impacts her mental health.

It is not fair that, as life begins to return to normal for many of us, those who are immunocompromised, like my constituent, are forced to choose to continue to isolate. What can the First Minister say to my constituent and to people like her? Has the Scottish Government considered the introduction of antibody therapies for pre-exposure prophylaxis, such as AstraZeneca's Evusheld, to protect immunocompromised people from the effects of Covid-19?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I will write to the member or ask the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care to write to her, with more detail of what I am about to say, because I will say it only in summary now.

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation advises further boosters for people who are immunosuppressed or immunocompromised, which might be helpful in this case.

I set out in my statement earlier in the week some of the new developments around treatment and the work that the Scottish Government is doing to ensure that those treatments get to people who need them most. Treatments have already been delivered to people who need hospital care, and they are now being delivered to people who do not need hospital care but might be at risk of it. New oral therapies are being trialled

and I am sure that the point about antibodies is an important part of that process.

My last point is one that I sought to make on Tuesday in my statement. We cannot, and should not, tolerate a situation in which the majority of us can get back to normal but a minority feel that they need to continue to shield. That is why I say to people that, as we get back to normal, we have to show collective responsibility and solidarity. Those of us who might be frustrated with the situation might choose, for example, still to wear face coverings to make it more possible for those who are most vulnerable to get back to normal, too.

We must not allow the creation of a two-tier society as we recover from Covid. However, that requires all of us to take responsibility and to make sacrifices, and I hope that everybody across the country will take that seriously.

### Climate Change Committee Report

**Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** The United Kingdom Climate Change Committee has today called for a “presumption against exploration” in relation to new oil and gas, making the case that renewables investment is the “best way” to tackle the energy price crisis.

I am proud of Scotland’s progress on renewables. Will the First Minister press the UK Government to end its policy of maximum economic recovery and to start listening to the climate science?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** That is an important question. I have made clear the Scottish Government’s position on maximum economic recovery. We must make sure that we face up to the tough decisions as we progress towards net zero.

The Climate Change Committee report that has been published today is well worth a read for everyone. It does not quite go as far as to say that there should be no further exploration, but Mark Ruskell summarises it reasonably fairly when he talks about a “presumption”. It also says that it is wrong to say that new exploration will have a meaningful impact on energy costs for consumers.

All Governments have to take this issue seriously, but the powers lie with the UK Government, so we will continue to make our arguments very strongly.

### Cabinet (Meetings)

**3. Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** To ask the First Minister when the Cabinet will next meet. (S6F-00832)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** Tuesday.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** I am grateful for that reply.

The aggression that has been demonstrated by the Russian regime in recent days asks us, once again, searching questions about our energy security. Fifteen years ago, Alex Salmond thundered that Scotland would become the “Saudi Arabia of renewables”. A few weeks ago, the First Minister boasted of a “truly historic” opportunity for renewables jobs. Now, the new owner of the Burntisland Fabrications site, InfraStrata plc, has secured work, but cannot find Scottish workers. There are not enough trained workers among the colossal wind farms of the Forth estuary to build even eight turbine jackets. Instead, the new owner has had to recruit dozens of workers from abroad, because the Scottish National Party has failed to train enough skilled workers here. Not only are most of the wind farms being built in the far east, but the work that we have won is not being built by workers from Scotland. Does that not show that the SNP’s renewables policy is all wind and no jobs?

**The First Minister:** I do not agree with that, but there are important issues are the heart of the question. Alex Cole-Hamilton has described the challenge, and my Government is getting on with offering the solutions. I have been frank in the past: I do not think that we have done well enough in securing the economic supply chain and jobs benefits of our massive renewables opportunities, and I am absolutely certain that we must do much better in the future.

A substantial body of work is under way to ensure that, as we take advantage of the opportunities of ScotWind, we build the economic advantages to go along with it. I am determined that we will get that right. There are global shortages of some of the skills that we are talking about, which is a problem, and there are recruitment challenges that are, of course, exacerbated by Brexit. We are focused on ensuring that, as we take advantage of the amazing opportunities, particularly of offshore wind, this and future generations will see the benefits in jobs and economic activity. I certainly look forward to keeping members updated on that in the months and years to come.

### School Assault Allegations (Scottish Borders Council)

**4. Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government’s response is to the report by Andrew Webster QC into the handling by Scottish Borders Council of school assault allegations, in particular those relating to the abuse of vulnerable children in the Tweeddale support unit. (S6F-00842)



**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** The findings of the report are deeply concerning. First and foremost, my thoughts are with the children and families that have been affected. All children have the right to be cared for and protected from harm and to grow up in a safe environment in which their rights are respected and their needs are met.

Every local authority is expected to have in place appropriate child protection policies and procedures and effective processes to ensure that concerns about the safety and protection of children are identified and dealt with. The Scottish Government remains ready to work with Scottish Borders Council to assist it in addressing any concerns that are raised by the inquiry.

**Christine Grahame:** The QC described the actions of the council as “reprehensible”. The parents’ voices were ignored for four years. There was an internal inquiry and the parents were told that it was done and dusted—nothing to see here, please move on. They had to press for a successful criminal prosecution and for the independent inquiry, which took four years.

I asked the parents what they wanted to ask the Scottish Government. This is it: will the First Minister consider making it mandatory that, when children are in the care of a local authority and issues of child protection arise, investigations are not in-house, because there is more than a whiff of a cover-up in this case?

Given the fact that, during those four years, many of the relevant officers have retired or been employed elsewhere—one has even promoted to chief executive of another council—disciplinary proceedings are irrelevant and, in fact, redundant. Will the Scottish Government therefore consider exploring extending the principle of corporate crime to councils and their officials?

**The First Minister:** Given the seriousness of the issue, I want to say very clearly, through Christine Grahame, to the parents involved that I will, of course, consider any representations that are made to me.

Although I will not pre-empt consideration of the two specific issues that Christine Grahame has raised, I assure her that we will take them seriously and look closely at them. I am happy to communicate with parents through Christine Grahame as that consideration develops.

Learning from such cases is a vital part of an effective and improving child protection system. That, of course, includes looking at how the criminal law might operate. Alongside Education Scotland, the Scottish Government will seek to work with Scottish Borders Council on actions to address the inquiry’s recommendations, and to

consider any learning that can be applied at the national level.

I will look at any further changes, such as those just outlined by Christine Grahame, that could further strengthen our child protection systems and make sure that parents and everyone who needs it has confidence in those arrangements. Few things in our society can be more important than that.

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** I am concerned about the role of the General Teaching Council for Scotland in child protection. When I asked the GTCS how many child protection concerns had been referred to it, I was told that it did not know, and it would be too expensive to find out. It says that it is not in the front line of child protection but, according to Scottish Government policy, everyone has a job in the safeguarding of children. Does the First Minister think that it is right that the regulator for teacher conduct is not in the front line of child protection?

**The First Minister:** I am happy to look at the issue because it is important, and I will come back to Willie Rennie when I have the opportunity to do so.

In principle, however, I believe that all of us in Government, local government, and Government agencies, as well as all of us as individual citizens, have an obligation and responsibility around child protection and we should consider that we are all in the front line of that, to a greater or lesser extent. The GTCS obviously has particular responsibilities.

I will consider the comments that Willie Rennie has attributed to the GTCS in the chamber today, and any difficulties with getting information out of the GTCS, and I will then be happy to come back with more detail when I have the chance to do so.

### Scottish Crofting Commission

**5. Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government’s response is to the recent report on the Scottish Crofting Commission. (S6F-00816)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** The Crofting Commission and the Scottish Government will reflect on the findings of the Public Audit Committee’s report, and consider what further actions might need to be taken on its findings and recommendations.

Action is already under way to address issues through an extensive improvement plan. To date, 28 actions out of a total of 41 recommendations that were made in the audit report undertaken by Deloitte have been implemented or are in the process of being implemented. Officials will

continue to monitor the actions laid out in the commission's improvement plan to ensure that improvements are achieved and maintained.

**Rachael Hamilton:** The report is damning and says that the Crofting Commission and the Scottish Government have failed to act on concerns that were raised in 2016. The SNP is in a state of paralysis on crofting reform. It failed to introduce a bill in the previous parliamentary session, and it dropped crofting law reform from last year's programme for government.

Crofting has the potential to make a great contribution to rural Scotland, but the First Minister's continued inaction is blocking reform and deterring new entrants. Why is the First Minister letting down Scotland's crofters?

**The First Minister:** Not surprisingly, I do not agree with that characterisation, but I do agree about the importance of crofting to local communities and the overall landscape and economy of Scotland. These are important issues and we will continue to take forward crofting reforms as appropriate.

The rural affairs secretary has regular meetings with the Crofting Commission to discuss progress of the implementation of its actions and wider issues. We will continue to make sure that the Crofting Commission delivers on the actions in its improvement plan, and we will also take forward appropriate reforms so that crofters and crofting continue to have the important place in Scotland that they have had for a long time.

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** The Crofting Commission and other similar organisations that have had negative audit reports have cited interference by the Scottish Government. Boards need to be clear about their duties and responsibilities, and the Scottish Government needs to respect their role. Will the First Minister urgently carry out a review of the governance structures of the Crofting Commission and other similar bodies to ensure that they are fit for purpose?

**The First Minister:** Rarely a day goes by in this chamber—including today—when the Scottish Government is not called on to intervene and take action in relation to agencies or organisations that operate at arm's length. When we do, we often face the accusation that we are interfering. We continue to try to get that balance right in the interests of the people we serve.

I said in my initial answer that we will reflect carefully on the Public Audit Committee's report and consider what further action we need to take. It is, of course, important that organisations such as the Crofting Commission understand their roles and responsibilities, including in relation to the Scottish Government. We will reflect on the matter

carefully, but we will also continue to support the Crofting Commission to implement the actions that are in its improvement plan.

### Social Care Provision

**6. Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's position is on the reported view from Common Weal that action is needed to address weaknesses in social care provision due to it being in a critical state, not fit for purpose, underfunded, rationed, fragmented, centralised and risk averse. (S6F-00815)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I agree that action is needed, which is why we are taking forward the establishment of a national care service. That will help to end the postcode lottery of adult care in this country. A key aspect of that will be ensuring that it is designed with service users, so that the barriers to care that they too often face are taken down.

At this point, it would probably be helpful to quote Derek Feeley, who undertook the review of adult social care. He said:

"We won't achieve the potential of social care support in Scotland without a new delivery system. We need a National Care Service to achieve the consistency that people deserve, to drive national improvements where they are required, to ensure strategic integration with the National Health Service, to set national standards, terms and conditions, and to bring national oversight and accountability to a vital part of Scotland's social fabric."

That is what we are seeking to achieve.

**Alex Rowley:** I am grateful to the First Minister for that answer. Although, as legislation is introduced, there will undoubtedly be a debate about what kind of national care service we will have, there are immediate problems that need to be addressed.

Will the First Minister agree to look at the inequality in the care workforce? In effect, we have a two-tier workforce. The majority of carers are women, and their pay and terms and conditions depend on whether they are employed in the public sector or in the private independent sector. Unless that is addressed now, we will not be able to fix the social care problems that are escalating out of control. Will the First Minister agree to look immediately at the issue of the unfair and unequal treatment of care workers in Scotland?

**The First Minister:** We are taking a range of immediate and short-term actions. For example, we are putting more investment into social care and taking action to increase the pay and improve the conditions of the social care workforce. I recognise that there are different employers involved, which leads to apparent inequities and injustices. One of the objectives of the national

care service is to deliver national terms and conditions, but through, for example, the national living wage and our fair work practices, we are seeking to address such issues not just in social care but across the economy.

We will continue to take short-term actions while we build a new system that is fit for the future. I hope and believe that there will be a rigorous and robust debate in the Parliament about the detail of that. I really welcome that, but the Parliament has an opportunity to make a generational change in how we deliver social care across our country.

**The Presiding Officer:** I call Michelle Thomson.

**Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP):** I apologise, Presiding Officer—I had a supplementary to an earlier question.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you. In that case, I call Finlay Carson.

### Curling

**Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** Will the First Minister join me in congratulating and recognising the remarkable achievements of Eve Muirhead and her team GB women's curling rink in their historic victory in winning the gold medal at the winter Olympics in Beijing, and Bruce Mouat, who, alongside his team GB colleagues, won silver? Their success will now inspire many young men and women to take up what I believe is Scotland's real national sport, which was first played here 500 years ago.

Will she also applaud the role of small community curling clubs and facilities such as the Dumfries, Stranraer, and Perth curling rinks, and many others across Scotland, which provide opportunity for players of all ages with a wide range of abilities and disabilities to take up the sport, and will she thank the Royal Caledonian Curling Club and British Curling, which not only nurture the sport at grass-roots level but create a world-class training environment for curling to thrive in? *[Applause.]*

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I am tempted just to say yes to all of that and to sit down, which I am sure is what the member would prefer, but I will elaborate a little. I agree with all those points about the communities in Scotland who support curling, and about the work of British Curling, Scottish Curling and all who have contributed to the success that has been enjoyed over the past few days.

I begin by congratulating team Mouat, the men's team, for their amazing achievement. That was a really tense match. They just missed out on gold, but they should be really proud of themselves. They did themselves, all of Scotland and team GB proud.

It gives me great pleasure to take the opportunity to say a massive congratulations to Eve Muirhead and to all of team Muirhead for winning an Olympic gold medal. There is no doubt that all of the team deserve our congratulations, but Eve Muirhead is well on her way to becoming one of the true global greats of her sport; in fact, I think that she is already there.

Congratulations to all of them. In what are really tough times, they gave us all something to smile about over the weekend, and we are grateful to all of them for that. *[Applause.]*

### Cancer Diagnosis and Treatment

**Foysoil Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab):** I raise the case of my constituent Anne Sinclair, who, last October, after waiting seven months for diagnostic procedures, was told that she has an aggressive form of endometrial cancer, for which she is still awaiting treatment, due to the omicron wave.

The First Minister will be aware of the importance of early diagnosis in the successful treatment of cancer. Does she agree that Mrs Sinclair's situation is not good enough? What assurance can she give to my other constituents who are waiting for a cancer diagnosis that they will not be left in a similar position?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** Yes, from what the member has said, I absolutely agree that Mrs Sinclair's situation does not sound at all acceptable. Through the member, I pass my thoughts to her at what I am sure is an incredibly difficult time.

We have sought to prioritise cancer care throughout the pandemic, recognising the importance of early diagnosis and early access to treatment. Plans are already being implemented to further speed up diagnosis and to ensure that treatment is swift and of high quality, but we want to make sure—and have a responsibility to make sure—that that is the experience of every patient who is suffering through cancer diagnosis.

I will not go too much further into the specific circumstances of Mrs Sinclair's case, because it is not possible for me to do so. However, if the member will write to me with the detail, I will ask the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care to look into that in particular, and to come back to him as soon as possible.

### Peterhead Prison Museum

**Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con):** The old prison at Peterhead was turned into a visitor attraction in 2016. After spending time there—as a visitor, not a resident—I say that it is an excellent day out. The museum is struggling financially, due to the pandemic, and I believe that it has written to the First Minister, pleading for

financial assistance. Will she commit to providing financial assistance to save Peterhead Prison Museum from closure?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** First, I am sure that I speak on behalf of all members when I say that we are all delighted that Douglas Lumsden was there only as a visitor. *[Interruption.]* Christine Grahame is saying that we only have his word for that, but I am sure that there is objective evidence as well.

It is a serious matter. Visitor attractions across the country have suffered greatly because of Covid, and we are seeking to help them recover. As I am sure the member will appreciate, I am not able today to give a commitment to financial assistance for Peterhead Prison Museum in particular, but I undertake to look in detail at the matter and to consider whether we can do more—or, perhaps more appropriately, whether the local council can be encouraged to do more—to support it.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes First Minister's question time. There will be a brief pause before members' business.

## Torness Nuclear Power Station

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-02776, in the name of Craig Hoy, on the decommissioning of Torness nuclear power station. The debate will be concluded without any question being put. I ask members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons now, please.

### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament notes that the decision has been taken to bring forward the decommissioning date of Torness Nuclear Power Station from 2030 to 2028; further notes EDF Energy's assessment that the station is one of the most productive in its fleet of nuclear power stations; recognises that, since the station first started generating electricity in 1988, EDF Energy reports that the plant has produced nearly 280 TWh of zero-carbon electricity, which is understood to be sufficient to power every home in Scotland for 28 years; understands that Torness employs around 500 staff and 250 contractors, with a salary bill of around £40 million annually, which, it considers, boosts the Dunbar and East Lothian economy; notes that Hunterston B power station, in North Ayrshire, has recently shut down for the last time, after what it considers to have been 46 years of reliable energy generation and job creation, and further notes calls urging the Scottish Government to review its decision to use the Scottish planning system to block the development of any future civilian nuclear energy projects in order that nuclear power continues to play a central part in the provision of zero-carbon electricity in Scotland.

12:56

**Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con):** I welcome colleagues from across the Parliament and across the country to the debate. Although the motion centres on the future of Torness nuclear power station in Dunbar, the benefits of Torness are felt right across Scotland and beyond.

Torness started operating in 1988 and EDF Energy has recognised it as one of the most productive power stations in its fleet. Since it started generating safe and clean power, Torness has produced nearly 280TWh of zero-carbon electricity. That is enough to power every home in Scotland for 28 years. The station has provided many stable high-skilled and high-paid jobs since construction began in 1980, and today Torness is one of East Lothian's largest employers, with 500 staff, 250 contractors and a salary bill that totals £40 million per year. That is £40 million—and more, through supply-chain jobs—that benefits families and the local and national economies.

Torness has also provided much-needed apprenticeships in an area where too many young people must travel outwith the region for training or skilled careers. Take the five new EDF apprentices, who started last September: they will learn basic engineering skills in their first year,

before specialising in their trade in the second year. They will also get opportunities to gain life skills as part of the apprenticeship programme, before completing the final two years back in Dunbar. That is just one of the many positive benefits that Torness power station brings to the South Scotland region.

As members will know, Torness is set to be decommissioned in 2028—two years ahead of the original schedule. The decision to bring forward decommissioning is the result of analysis of other sites, which provided EDF with a clearer picture of lifetime expectations as the station ages. The station is operating normally and safely, but it is coming towards the end of its natural operational lifespan. I thank EDF for the undertaking that, wherever possible, early and advanced employee engagement will provide career development and reskilling opportunities for the people who work at Torness.

There will be no hard cliff edge of job losses in 2028, although redundancies and redeployment are still likely to lie ahead. As happened at Hunterston B, jobs will taper off as the defuelling process takes place, before EDF hands over to Magnox Ltd to manage the full decommissioning process.

**Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab):** Does Craig Hoy agree that, although the jobs in Torness will be safe beyond the closure date, the chance for future apprenticeships and the skills that young people could have learned will be lost, because new apprenticeships will not be available after the closure?

**Craig Hoy:** There is a significant opportunity cost as the nuclear industry leaves the region that I represent.

The opportunity for future skilled jobs will be undermined by the closure of Torness and the wider removal of the nuclear energy sector from Scotland. As Mr Whitfield said, East Lothian residents will also lose the opportunity to get skilled jobs in the nuclear energy sector. If Paul McLennan speaks in the debate, I am sure that he will rightly ask, “What about renewables?” That is what Friends of the Earth asked in a briefing, yesterday. However, why cannot we have a future that includes both nuclear and renewable energy? That future would make East Lothian the jewel in Scotland’s energy crown, by offering skilled and renewable energy jobs now and into the future.

I accept that the eventual closure of the reactors at Torness is inevitable, but I do not accept that the end of the nuclear energy sector in Scotland is inevitable. I do not accept that the loss of the clean and stable energy supply that nuclear power provides is inevitable. I do not accept that loss of the skilled jobs in the sector is inevitable. I do not

accept that the loss of the economic benefits that nuclear energy brings to East Lothian and Scotland is inevitable. That is all the direct result of the SNP’s and Green Party’s irrational hostility towards nuclear energy. The coalition of chaos have got it wrong—and they have not even done the modelling to assess the economic impact of their actions.

If we want to meet and exceed Scotland’s net-zero ambitions, nuclear power must have a role to play. I welcome the fact that East Lothian is now at the forefront of a significant renewables push, but renewables alone will not meet our requirements for stable and affordable energy supplies through the transition period. The Scottish Government is driving North Sea oil and gas into the ground, so it is madness to turn our backs on nuclear energy at the same time.

Energy is reserved, but the planning system is not. The Scottish Government is using the planning system to scrap nuclear power by the back door. In doing so, it is setting itself on a mission to fail to meet its target of net-zero emissions by 2045. I have yet to hear a well-reasoned argument for Scotland rejecting nuclear energy.

Let us be in no doubt—the SNP Government’s opposition to nuclear energy is playground politics at its worst. It is more about playing to the prejudices of the Greens than it is about achieving a safe, secure, sustainable and affordable energy supply. The opposition of the SNP and the Greens to nuclear power is the politics of the student union.

The SNP has mistakenly conflated its misplaced attitude to nuclear energy with its misplaced attitude to nuclear defence—the tired old mantras, “Ban Trident” and “Bairns not bombs”, are now influencing its views on energy. For reasons that are known only to itself, the SNP Government has sought to demonise the word “nuclear”, despite the safety and security that nuclear power provides to Scotland and the UK. Today, of all days, where would we be if the SNP and the Greens had their way on energy—or, indeed, defence policy?

The Scottish Government should reverse its short-sighted opposition to nuclear energy. My party will stand up for the nuclear energy industry. We will stand up for the jobs of the people who work at Torness and for the contribution that Torness makes to the local economy. I hope that fellow members, including the member for East Lothian and his SNP colleagues, will rethink their position. I hope that they will stand up for local jobs, promote sustainable energy and drop their opposition to next-generation nuclear energy in Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Before I call the next member, I remind all members who wish to speak in the debate that they need to press their request-to-speak buttons. I am not looking at anyone in particular.

13:03

**Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP):** I thank Craig Hoy for bringing the debate to Parliament. I agree with much of what he said. I will touch on points that I do not disagree with.

Torness has been one of the most productive stations in EDF's nuclear fleet and it has contributed to the local economy. There is no doubt about that. I visited Torness after I was elected in May, and I visited it previously when I was the leader of East Lothian Council. I have also had two meetings with the previous and new station managers. I know many people who have worked at the station and people who work there now. I commend Torness's contribution to electricity generation and to the local economy.

Now, we need to ask what the best solution is for electricity generation and for contributing to net zero and employability. Renewables—mostly wind power—produced the equivalent of 98.6 per cent of Scotland's electricity consumption in 2020.

The Scottish Government will bring forward an updated energy strategy in the spring—I am sure that the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport will touch on that. It will be no surprise to hear that the strategy will not include a change in position on nuclear power. That has been made clear by the cabinet secretary and the First Minister. The strategy will come alongside a just transition plan.

I am aware of the increasing interest in the development of new nuclear technologies—for example, small modular reactors, which have been mentioned in the chamber before. The Scottish Government will, of course, be duty bound to assess new technologies and low-carbon energy solutions, and it will continue to do so based on their safety case, their value for consumers and their contribution to Scotland's low-carbon economy and energy future.

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** I am encouraged, because I think that I have just heard Paul McLennan say that there is a possibility that he and his party will support deployment of small modular reactors. Does he agree that, on this day of all days, it is wrong to continue with the demonisation of “nuclear” as a word and of nuclear power as a source of clean energy?

**Paul McLennan:** I do not agree that I said that I would support SMRs. That is not what I said. I said that the Scottish Government is duty bound to

assess them. I think that the cabinet secretary and the First Minister have said that, as well. They remain doubtful, but they will look at the matter, and are duty bound to do so.

In 2016, Hinkley Point C nuclear power plant received a contract for difference strike price of £92.50 per megawatt hour, which has increased by some 25 per cent since then. In January this year, the project was pushed back by another six months, and its estimated cost has increased by another £500 million. Recent power price spikes underline the need to create better outcomes from energy investments, particularly for people who are struggling with household finances.

Analysis has identified that, in 2030 alone, Hinkley could add almost £40 a year to consumers' bills, whereas equivalent offshore wind could reduce them by £8. Significant growth in renewables, storage, hydrogen and carbon capture is the best way to secure Scotland's future energy needs and meet our net zero objectives.

We heard at First Minister's question time that the United Kingdom Climate Change Committee has recommended that renewables-based energy is the best way of reducing exposure to volatile price rises. That was announced today.

**Craig Hoy:** I might be pre-empting Paul McLennan, but he has not mentioned jobs yet. Has he grasped, yet, that it is the job of members of Parliament to come to Parliament and defend jobs in their constituencies and not to throw them under a bus?

**Paul McLennan:** Of course I have. I will come on to that.

The recent ScotWind leasing announcement about 17 new projects is, of course, extremely welcome. A total of just under £700 million will be paid by successful applicants in option fees, to be passed to the Scottish Government for public spending.

There will also be multibillion-pound supply chain investment in Scotland—I will touch on that later. The power that will potentially be generated will provide for expanding electrification of the Scottish economy, as we move to net zero. Of course, once the leasing agreements are officially signed, the details of the supply chain commitments by the applicants, as part of their supply chain development statements, will be published. I have already met the Scottish Offshore Wind Energy Council and Scottish Renewables on the issues. I will touch on that matter again.

The recent Scottish Renewables statement, “Scotland's Offshore Wind Sector: Supply Chain Impact 2020”, revealed that wind-energy capacity could increase by 231 per cent in the next eight

years. The report also found that the sector could triple in size by 2030. The sector already employs 23,000 people. The long-established offshore wind and hydro power industries were worth £2.4 billion and £915 million respectively in 2019.

What can we do locally? On 18 March I will convene a meeting of energy companies to look at the future of employment in the sector in East Lothian. The meeting will focus on skills and labour, supply chain development, manufacturing opportunities and community benefits. The following organisations, all of which I have met individually, will attend the meeting on 18 March: Inch Cape Offshore, Seagreen Wind Energy—which includes SSE and TotalEnergies—EDF Renewables, Scottish Power, EDF Energy nuclear, the Scottish Gas Network, Community Windpower, Viridor, Skills Development Scotland, the Department for Work and Pensions, Scottish Enterprise, East Lothian Council, Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh College, Scottish Engineering, Scottish Renewables, the Scottish Government and Unite the union. .

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr McLennan, I have been generous. I know that you have taken interventions, but other members need to speak.

**Paul McLennan:** I have taken a few interventions.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I know, but time is moving on. I have given you some latitude because of that. Please now bring your remarks to a close.

**Paul McLennan:** A series of meetings will look at the opportunities that renewables will bring directly to East Lothian.

Every worker who wished to stay with EDF at Hunterston remained with the company.

In conclusion, I say that the position on renewables offers East Lothian many opportunities. It offers opportunities in increased employment, supply-side development, manufacturing and community benefits. As the East Lothian constituency MSP, I am clear that the transition needs to be managed well and that it requires constant engagement with all. We are already doing that, and we will continue to do so.

13:09

**Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con):** I thank Craig Hoy for this debate, which allows members who have hosted nuclear energy facilities in their regions to participate. That applies not only to East Lothian but to my West of Scotland region and the Hunterston B power station.

We should be honest in saying that Hunterston B was not entirely uncontroversial in its origin, but

over the years it has grown to be a great source of both debate and pride—in equal measure—for the people of North Ayrshire. Whatever our personal or political views, it has undoubtedly led the charge in delivering reliable, low-carbon and cost-effective power to homes across Scotland and beyond.

The plant first opened in 1976 and has provided 46 years of energy generation and hundreds, if not thousands, of jobs directly and indirectly, as well as important apprenticeships. We owe every worker there a huge debt of gratitude. They and their families were welcome and have become part of the fabric of the community and of society in my region.

At its peak, the power station could provide enough energy to power 1.7 million homes. Over its lifespan, Hunterston B has saved 224 million tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions when compared to emissions from traditional, carbon-based methods of energy creation.

Members will know that cracks in the reactor began to appear in recent years, which rightly caused concern. I was the first to hold regular meetings and calls with civic agencies, the plant, its owners and local community interest groups that had concerns. The plant's doors have now closed and the de-fuelling process will commence, at which point it will be handed to the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority.

Although we are losing that facility, there is exciting potential on the horizon, on which I will focus my brief comments. North Ayrshire Council, along with partners from the University of Glasgow and the private sector and others, is currently bidding to host the UK's first nuclear fusion facility, in Ardeer, near Ardrossan, through the UK spherical tokamak for energy production programme. That is a bid that I will support, and I hope that members in my own and other parties will support it, too.

I am sure that we all received briefings before the debate that slightly downplayed the importance of modern nuclear technology in our efforts to move towards net zero. I respect other people's views on that, but what makes the Ardeer bid so different is that it will operate by using nuclear fusion rather than nuclear fission. That is the key.

Fission creates energy by splitting nuclei into smaller particles; fusion does exactly the opposite. Hundreds of millions of tiny reactions every second can provide a massive amount of energy by using very small amounts of fuel. That sounds technical, but it is important. Fusion is efficient, it is safer and cleaner—and it is cheaper. One kg of fusion fuel could provide the same amount of energy as 10 million kg of fossil fuel.

Let us think about that for a second. By 2050, the world will be using twice as much electricity as it does today. As populations grow and living standards rise, the amount of energy that we use rises. We must ask ourselves a simple question: how on earth will we provide for those energy needs?

Current events in Ukraine remind us of the fragility of the supply of gas in particular. Prices were on the rise, and I have no doubt that they will rise further. Members extol sanctions for energy companies in one debate in this Parliament but then bemoan the energy crisis and the cost of living in another. That is all very well—both arguments are viable, but viable solutions must also be found.

**Paul McLennan:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Jamie Greene:** I am short on time. I apologise—I wish I had more time.

I am not advocating nuclear power as the only source of energy. No one doubts the importance of renewables in Scotland. Renewable energy is one of our environment's great assets, but the reality is that we are simply not there yet. Renewables alone cannot and will not fulfil all our energy needs. They may provide our electricity in the future, but not our gas. We still need it and we still use it, so we either extract it or buy it.

There is a lack of interest and enthusiasm from SNP members, not only in North Ayrshire but across Scotland. There is a lack of a strategy for creating so-called green jobs on the ground. Where are the jobs that will replace those at Hunterston? I want to cement Scotland's reputation as being at the forefront of scientific excellence. Let us make progress towards net zero and rejuvenating our economy.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Greene, please bring your remarks to a close.

**Jamie Greene:** Let us secure our energy supply. First and foremost, let us not look back on this as a missed opportunity. I ask the cabinet secretary to listen to our requests.

13:14

**Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab):** I thank Craig Hoy for bringing to the chamber this members' business debate on such an important issue for East Lothian and South Scotland, and for energy provision across Scotland.

As we heard, the building of Torness began in 1980, and it first started generating power only eight years later, in 1988. It has been one of the most productive plants in the fleet, generating enough zero-carbon electricity—the zero carbon

for which we are all now striving—to power every house in Scotland for 28 years.

However, Torness is now working beyond its original expected 25 to 30-year design life. The design is from the 1970s—it is like going on holiday and hoping that you do not get an old-fashioned Boeing 747 that has been riveted together. Its continued operation is a tribute not only to the 550 EDF staff on site, plus the 180 full-time additional staff, but to the skills and knowledge of those who are in charge at EDF and those above who enforce the regulations for our civil nuclear fleet.

Electricity production at Torness will end in 2028, following inspection, modelling and operational experience gained from across the United Kingdom and further afield. The decisions that are being taken are based on evidence and knowledge, and are founded on the requirement for safety.

Jamie Greene, in his tribute to Hunterston B, referred to the information that was learned during that cycle of the fleet. Safety lies at the heart of the nuclear power industry, and it has done from day 1. That is why to conflate the use of nuclear power in the production of electricity—safe, zero-carbon electricity—with that of nuclear weapons is to do a disservice to a highly skilled industry.

Talking of the skills in the industry, I congratulate Lisa Hilferty, who, at 26, was named the station's apprentice of the year last year, after four years of skilled training. Murray Gilvray, Connel McNeill, Thomas Summerfield and Paige Gould all qualified as apprentices along with Lisa, and they are now able to take those skills and their trade around the world.

**Jamie Greene:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Martin Whitfield:** I will, if it is short.

**Jamie Greene:** I thank the member for giving way, as I know that he does not have much time.

The problem is what will replace those apprenticeships. If the Government's policy is not to nuclear per se, it must have something else to offer those young people, and at present a replacement simply does not exist.

**Martin Whitfield:** Absolutely—that is why I took the opportunity to pay tribute to those apprentices, who have been through a highly skilled course, with placements around the whole UK. They have not been supported by the apprenticeship fund because they travelled to England for part of their training. Nevertheless, the apprenticeship scheme shows EDF's commitment to young people and to moving forward.



The closure of Torness will mean a shortfall in capacity, and that gap has to be filled. In part, in all probability, it will be filled by gas from the global open market, from places such as Russia. That will prevent more ambitious emissions reductions, which will threaten the energy security of Scotland and the UK in the future.

I know that time is short, but I quickly pay tribute to those in the Civil Nuclear Constabulary, who have protected our nuclear fleet in some of the worst conditions that the weather can throw at them. They do so to keep us, our plants and the fleet safe but—most important—to retain energy security in the UK.

Nuclear power needs to play a part in our zero-carbon future.

13:18

**Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** I rise to make a small contribution regarding the final part of Craig Hoy's motion, in which he calls on the Scottish Government to review its blocking of any future civilian nuclear energy projects in Scotland.

Last week, Maree Todd set out the Scottish Government's position in the *John O'Groat Journal*. She rejected nuclear power as, she said, it has a "high cost" to consumers over other options; it is "high risk" in terms of safety; and it is not "sustainable". She said:

"We must focus on reliable energy sources that ... align with our net-zero ambitions ... I believe that the renewables plan, as set out in the Scottish Energy Strategy, offers just that."

Not unusually, Maree Todd's arguments, when they are stress tested, lack foundation. She is apparently unaware that the Scottish Government confirmed to me earlier this month that it has no strategic plan to transition from Scottish-generated nuclear energy to renewables. I do not know how she knows that nuclear does not

"align with our net zero ambitions".

That is extraordinary, given that the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport told me that,

"it is not currently possible to distinguish between types of generation or fuels"—[*Written Answers*, 21 January 2022; S6W-05511.]

in order to break down CO<sub>2</sub> emissions data from energy generation sources in Scotland.

As Craig Hoy flagged, the Scottish Government will not replace Torness and Hunterston, but has done no modelling of the impact on energy bills and the cost of living crisis, so Maree Todd's cost claims are spurious at best.

Maree Todd justified her position by stating:

"I believe the vast majority of the public back my position."

I respectfully suggest that she reviews some YouGov research that was published in the run-up to the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26—which shows that, in Scotland, 65 per cent are in favour of a role for nuclear in the energy mix, 13 per cent are against and 20 per cent do not know.

Maree Todd also said that nuclear was "high risk" in terms of safety, but there have been no major nuclear safety incidents in the UK industry's 46 years. Anyone who has done their homework knows that all current operating stations have extraordinary levels of built-in redundancy and that new reactors are designed with even higher levels of safety built in, with further enhancements being made as the technology moves on, all while being subject to one of the most robust regulatory regimes in the world.

I turn to the economics of nuclear over other options. The price of power from Hunterston B until it was retired and from Torness is about £45 per MWh. Wind contracts for difference historically average around £90 to £100 per MWh and have only recently reduced to levels similar to those of Torness. In terms of build cost, the UK Government's proposed regulated asset base model will lower the cost of financing. As Paul McLennan will be delighted to hear, the National Audit Office says that that would have reduced Hinkley's costs by 40 per cent. In addition, wind turbines operate only 25 to 40 per cent of the time. Without nuclear power, when wind turbines are not operating, the grid would have to use expensive gas to fill the void. Nuclear stations operate more than 90 per cent of the time, which means that they require far less back-up.

On waste, members should bear in mind the fact that the nuclear industry is the only one to pay for and clean up its own waste. EDF and the UK Government have already set aside £14.8 billion to decommission the existing power stations and dispose of waste from them. An increasing fund, equivalent to about £2 per MWh, has been created to cover the cost. The amount of waste that is produced by nuclear is also very small. Almost all the radioactivity is found a tiny fraction of the waste, which is called high-level waste. Over the lifetime of a station, there is one dishwasher tablet-worth of such waste for every person in the UK.

That was a short contribution to the debate, but one that was necessary, if only to add some scientific and data-driven fortitude to a Scottish Government position that is anything but scientific and data driven.

13:23

**Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab):** Members have illustrated the challenge that Scotland faces with energy in future. With Scotland having used more nuclear power than any other UK nation in 2020—26 per cent of its electricity generation was from nuclear—the forthcoming end of generation at Torness and the cessation this year of generation at Hunterston B present a significant challenge to the resilience of Scotland's electricity grid.

According to the Climate Change Committee, the country will need four times as much clean power by 2050 to hit net zero and 38 per cent of that clean power will need to be from firm, reliable, always-on power sources regardless of weather conditions, so we are faced with a stark choice: reliance on gas or the utilisation of new-generation nuclear stations. Whether in Scotland or other parts of the United Kingdom, it is as simple as that.

We are presented with a choice. That choice is not simply the non sequitur presented by other members, such as Hinkley Point C. I am not a fan of the European pressurised water reactor technology. It is a dog of a design and deeply problematic. It is a symptom of the domination of the British nuclear industry by the French state. Other opportunities are presented to us not only to consider new technologies but to build an industrial renaissance in Scotland by being at the forefront of the energy industry.

In 1933, the father of nuclear physics, Sir Ernest Rutherford, said:

“Energy produced by ... breaking down ... the atom is a very poor kind of thing. Anyone who expects a source of power from transformation of these atoms is talking moonshine ... We hope in the next few years to get some idea of what these atoms are, how they are made, and the way they are worked.”

That statement by Rutherford illustrates how great minds can fail to anticipate the evolutionary direction of their own discoveries. Like all scientific discoveries, the conversion of matter into energy can be used for good or ill, and it is for us to make the right choices.

New types of nuclear reactors have significant potential to counter the three principal threats to public acceptance of nuclear power generation by improving safety, reducing waste and reducing cost. That opens up the prospect of their making an important contribution to any future emissions reduction strategy, and Scotland should support the development of such nuclear power technology.

Nuclear generation has a very small CO<sub>2</sub> footprint, but most existing nuclear plants are not suitable for coping with variations in grid demand

and cannot contribute to restarting the system after a grid failure, because the presence of the grid is required as a prerequisite for the reactor to start up. As a result, we should seek to design nuclear plants that are more commercially competitive, reliable and flexible and which exploit inherently passive safety features that can contribute very significantly to capital cost reduction. Such ambitions might seem like a tall order, but new fourth-generation reactor technology should be able to deliver such a vision.

For example, designs for molten salt reactors are showing great promise in a number of countries, and they have the potential to achieve large cost savings by removing the hazards that could lead to the explosive release of dangerous fission products into the atmosphere. In the hierarchy of approaches to safety engineering, hazard elimination, harm reduction and managing the likelihood or mitigation of consequences of the hazard itself normally prove to be the most cost-effective strategy, and that is where technologies such as molten salt come into their own.

Other favourable features of molten salt reactors include the elimination of salt and steel corrosion problems through chemical-reducing properties in the coolant formulation and the ability to carry out refuelling on load and unpressurised, further reducing capital costs. Moreover, the maintenance of long-lived radioactive waste is much easier and cheaper, because radioactive waste with a fairly long half-life is converted into much shorter half-life isotopes. A range of fuel types can also be used; for example, thorium fuel has the potential to be used when uranium reserves begin to run out, and the UK legacy stock of plutonium can be used for new fuel production. Indeed, the reuse of plutonium as fuel would have immense strategic value in removing or reducing the proliferation of potential weapons material. Finally, molten salt reactors can also be produced as road-transportable modules.

We have the potential to utilise such new technologies to build a supply chain in Scotland that can crowd in wealth and opportunity. If the nuclear industry had not evolved from military imperatives and had developed independently, the molten salt technology that is now under development would probably be regarded as a dream contribution to the challenges of reliability and carbon reduction in the electricity system. That is the opportunity that we could have if we fundamentally reassessed what nuclear energy could present the country with, and I urge the cabinet secretary to broaden his horizons and consider these emerging fourth-generation technologies. Scotland could be leading on this globally, and we should seize that opportunity.

13:28

**The Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport (Michael Matheson):** I congratulate Craig Hoy on securing time for this important debate on Torness, which is an important facility for Scotland. It has provided power for more than 30 years and will continue to do so for the next couple. I recognise the valuable role that the workforce has played over many decades and, indeed, the important role that the facility itself plays in the East Lothian community. Indeed, those very points were highlighted by Craig Hoy, Paul McLennan and Martin Whitfield.

A timeframe has been set for the facility to come offline and move into the decommissioning phase, and as a key part of that, Scottish Government agencies will work in partnership with the National Decommissioning Authority to see what support and assistance can be provided to the workforce as the facility transitions away from being a nuclear power station to other opportunities. Of course, with the facility planning to come offline in 2028, we need to consider whether Scotland's electricity supply will remain secure with that loss of output. That is why National Grid conducted a detailed study into the effects of the earlier decision to end production at Torness.

The study from National Grid, which is responsible for ensuring security of supply, says that, as a result of the closure of that facility, Scotland's system remains secure, with some mitigations needing to be put in place, a key part of which is to increase our own capacity.

**Liam Kerr:** Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

**Michael Matheson:** I ask the member to let me make a bit of progress first.

Our energy sector has been in transition for some time now. We are very clear as a Government that our priorities are renewables, storage, hydrogen and carbon capture and storage. We believe that they provide the best pathway to Scotland reaching its net zero target by 2045, and we have been making very good progress in taking that forward over recent years, particularly with the expansion of renewable capacity. We now have the equivalent of around 98 per cent of our electricity coming from renewable sources, and we want to build on that and develop it further as we progress.

**Liam Kerr:** I am not entirely convinced by some of the statistics that we have just heard. However, going back to the point about National Grid, does the cabinet secretary not recognise that all of National Grid's future energy scenarios include nuclear?

**Michael Matheson:** In relation to the UK, yes, they do, but not here in Scotland in terms of security of supply, which is what the study specifically addressed. [*Interruption.*]

I hear Mr Kerr questioning—from a sedentary position, as ever—details of these matters. In relation to the 98 per cent, where exactly does he think that that figure comes from? It comes from the assessment through National Grid. Let me give some of the details. Scotland is currently a net electricity exporter. In 2020, Scotland exported 20.4TWh of electricity, which is the equivalent of powering every household in Scotland for 26 months. Scotland imported a little over 1TWh, and the net export of electricity from Scotland was 19.3TWh in 2020 alone, which was a record high level. That is a reflection of the investment that has been made in our renewable energy sector, and that is why it is a priority for us going forward.

We are very fortunate as a country to be in a position where we have such extensive potential to develop our renewables sector. It is important that we build on that and make progress, because it will help to decarbonise not only Scotland but the UK and beyond.

**Craig Hoy:** For clarity, and to address the point that Maree Todd made, does the cabinet secretary believe that nuclear power, and particularly the station at Torness, is safe?

**Michael Matheson:** Yes, I do accept that it is a safe facility, and there is a very strict regime around that. However, I think that it is wrong to try to give the impression that there is no risk associated with nuclear power. The events at Fukushima took place in 2011, which is not that long ago. [*Interruption.*] We need to be mindful of the risks that are also associated with it. It is not risk free, but it is a very safe—[*Interruption.*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Excuse me, cabinet secretary. Will you resume your seat for a second? Far too much is being said from a sedentary position. Mr Hoy, you intervened on the cabinet secretary and he gave you an answer, but you continued to speak from a sedentary position. That is not the way to do it. You should seek another intervention or listen to what the cabinet secretary says. Thank you.

**Michael Matheson:** I hope that I have answered the member's point.

Let me also point to the outcome of the first phase of ScotWind. The approach that Crown Estate Scotland has taken has demonstrated an ambition from the sector to deliver some 25GW of offshore wind across Scottish waters. That is testament to its confidence in the approach that the Scottish Government is taking in investing in and supporting our renewables sector, and we are

making sure that we also secure the jobs and other benefits that can come from that.

I turn to the point about the cost impact of the nuclear sector. Even if we set aside the waste and the environmental concerns, nuclear power is well recognised as representing poor value for customers. It is an expensive form of electricity to produce. The evidence that was provided by the contract that the UK Government awarded for Hinkley Point C, which Paul McLennan mentioned, is that the price for generating is £92.50 per megawatt hour.

Compare that with electricity generated from offshore wind: that is currently at £39.65 per megawatt hour.

**Stephen Kerr:** Will the cabinet secretary give way?

**Michael Matheson:** The assessment is that, under the UK's forward look at future generation, the costs as a result of Hinkley Point are potentially £40 for each household bill in 2030, in addition to the costs resulting from that programme alone, whereas the equivalent for offshore wind would be £8 less per year. *[Interruption.]*

I will give way to Mr Kerr, who can now stand on his feet and ask a question.

**Stephen Kerr:** I am very pleased to take this opportunity to stand on my feet and ask a question.

Paul McLennan raised the prospect that, with his responsibility for energy, the cabinet secretary would consider with an open mind the possibility of small modular reactors. Some of the issues that he has been discussing are addressed through the deployment of small modular reactors. We have heard some excellent speeches on the engineering and science behind it all. There is a real potential benefit in SMR. Will the cabinet secretary consider that with an open mind as a benefit for Scotland?

**Michael Matheson:** The reality is that, although small modular reactors represent a change in construction type, the technology is the same, by and large, on a smaller scale. As we have set out in our energy strategy, under existing technologies, we do not support new nuclear energy provision. That is the difference. Although there is a change in terms of scale and in the nature of its construction, in terms of the principle of the nuclear process, it remains the same, and it is not a new technology in that sense.

**Paul Sweeney:** Would the cabinet secretary accept that, as I outlined in my speech, the transformational effects of such technologies as molten salt can introduce passive safety, so it is actually a revolutionary change in how the nuclear

industry would operate, massively reducing the capital cost of stations? Even for the supply chain, Rolls-Royce is interested in building a heavy pressure vessel factory in the UK, with £200 million of investment. The cabinet secretary's colleague the member for Glasgow Provan says that he has not even met representatives of the company to discuss the prospects of that factory being located in Scotland. That is a supply chain opportunity for heavy engineering and advanced manufacturing. Would the cabinet secretary at least consider taking that up proactively with Rolls-Royce?

**Michael Matheson:** I am sure that Ivan McKee will respond to the particular point about pursuing anything with Rolls-Royce through inward investment but, given the position of the Scottish Government regarding the existing available technologies for fission nuclear energy, that is not consistent with our energy policy, and that will not change under the review of our existing energy strategy. That includes the small reactors to which the member has referred.

Liam Kerr made an interesting point in relation to the costs associated with decommissioning nuclear energy. He referred to the significant amount of money that EDF has set aside to cover nuclear decommissioning. Who does he think has provided that money? It is us—customers. We have provided that money through our bills. The cost of decommissioning is not something that is picked up by the companies under some philanthropic approach; it is based into the costs and is added on to our bills as a result. To try and give the impression that decommissioning is something that is picked up by the commercial companies alone is factually incorrect; it is met by the additional costs that are put on to customers' bills. That is why it is a poor deal for the taxpayer. Even Hunterston A, for example, which stopped producing electricity back in 1990, is still going through its decommissioning process, and the cost of that is fixed into people's household bills. That is why the costs of nuclear energy are well recognised as not being good value for customers.

That is why the Scottish Government's focus is on investing in renewable energy, making the best use of Scotland's natural assets and doing so in a way that is consistent with Scotland reaching net zero by 2045.

13:39

*Meeting suspended.*

14:30

*On resuming—*

## Portfolio Question Time

### Education and Skills

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

The next item of business is portfolio questions, and this afternoon's portfolio is education and skills. As ever, if a member wishes to ask a supplementary question, they should press their request-to-speak button or place an R in the chat function during the relevant question. Again, as ever, I would appreciate succinct questions and answers, to allow us to get through all the questions.

#### Teaching Assistants (Recruitment)

1. **Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to support expanded recruitment of teaching assistants. (S6O-00772)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** Since the start of the pandemic, we have provided £240 million of additional investment, specifically for the recruitment of more education staff, including classroom assistants. In addition to that funding, we are providing local authorities with permanent funding of £145.5 million per year to support the recruitment of extra teachers and support staff on permanent contracts.

Since 2019-20, we have also invested an additional £45 million in pupil support assistants for additional support for learning, and we will continue to provide extra support to local authorities by investing an additional £60 million over the next four years to support that.

**Bill Kidd:** Over the course of the pandemic, many pupils from lower income backgrounds, especially in areas of high multiple deprivation, were disproportionately impacted by the requirement to learn at home. Reasons for that greater impact range from cramped environments for studying to having fewer studying resources available at home. What resources is the Scottish Government providing to local councils to allow them to provide more teachers and teaching assistants? How will that benefit pupils who live in areas of multiple deprivation?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** In my original answer, I mentioned the £240 million that has been provided since the start of the pandemic. That has allowed local authorities to recruit additional teachers and school support staff and maintain them in the system. For example, there are now more than 2,000 more teachers in Scotland's schools than there were before the start of the pandemic in 2019. As I am sure Mr Kidd is aware, the Government was elected on a manifesto commitment to support the recruitment of 3,500 additional teachers and 500 support staff over this parliamentary session. That will mean a significant injection of resources, which will bring much-needed resilience into the system.

**Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab):** Can the cabinet secretary explain why her Government has cut the total marketing spend on teacher recruitment? In response to a freedom of information request, her Government revealed that, between 2017-18 and 2020-21, there was a cut of £163,000 in funding. Should the Government not use every tool possible to recruit the teachers?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** We absolutely should use every tool available and do so as effectively as possible. Of course, every year, we analyse not just the marketing material that goes out but our ability to use different channels. Social media and digital communication are exceptionally important and remain a main part of the campaign as we continue to provide for marketing for recruitment of new teachers.

#### Teaching Unions

2. **Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government when it last met with the teaching unions. (S6O-00773)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** The Scottish Government meets the teaching unions frequently through the offices of the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers, and has regular meetings with the teaching unions to discuss a range of issues relating to education, including through the Covid-19 education recovery group and the Scottish education council. I also meet the teaching unions biannually to discuss a range of topics.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** Last October, the Educational Institute of Scotland estimated that as many as one in 10 teachers in Scotland were on short-term contracts. The teaching profession is absolutely vital to this country and our recovery from Covid, and that is no way to treat it. The cabinet secretary has been asked several times exactly how many teachers are on those short-term contracts and what her Government intends

to do about it, but she has been unable to tell us. Is she any wiser today?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** Figures are published on the number of teachers who are on permanent and on temporary contracts. I mentioned them in my answer to Bill Kidd and, for the sake of time, I will not again go into the details of our commitment to provide resources to local authorities to ensure that teachers are being recruited on permanent contracts. That is exactly why we baselined that £145.5 million—to ensure that we see more permanent teachers and more support staff in our schools. The Government has taken action and will continue to take action to ensure that teachers are recruited and to encourage them to be put on permanent contracts. I would also make the point that recruitment and retention is a matter for local authorities.

**Siobhian Brown (Ayr) (SNP):** How are university students being supported in their learning and degree progress, in light of on-going strike action?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** We absolutely take that issue exceptionally seriously. I understand that the Minister for Higher Education and Further Education, Youth Employment and Training set out in a letter to the member that universities are autonomous institutions, and therefore staff pay and conditions are matters for universities to determine. Although ministers have no locus to intervene in such issues, I would expect universities to make every effort to minimise disruption for students, particularly in what is yet another difficult year for our university and college students.

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** The Educational Institute of Scotland has joined parents in opposing the creation of one super headteacher post to cover nine schools in Largo and the east neuk of Fife. In response to parent outrage, Fife Council has delayed that decision but has not ruled it out. From the cabinet secretary's position of leading education across the country, what advice does she give the council about that proposal for a super headteacher?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** Willie Rennie and his party are very keen to encourage Government not to step on the toes of local authorities. Local authorities have responsibility for recruitment and retention issues in relation to all teachers, including headteachers. However, I recognise that there has been major concern in the area about that issue, and I recognise the strength of feeling of parents on it. As with all issues that concern government, whether local or national, we would of course expect all elected members to respond carefully when there is that level of concern. The decision is for Fife Council, but I am sure that it has heard very clearly—as have I—the concern

from parents in the area. If the council is to make changes in that area, it must absolutely ensure that it justifies them and takes parents with it on that journey.

### Curriculum for Excellence

3. **Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how curriculum for excellence meets the needs of colleges and industries in providing appropriate learning to young people to allow them to progress to the next stage of their training. (S6O-00774)

**The Minister for Higher Education and Further Education, Youth Employment and Training (Jamie Hepburn):** The curriculum for excellence helps our children and young people gain the knowledge, skills and attributes that are needed for life in the 21st century. It enables strong school-college and school-employer partnerships and has stimulated an expansion of vocational opportunities, which ensure that our learners are prepared to progress to the next stage of their journey, whether that be further learning, training or employment.

The learner destination statistics that were published this week show that the proportion of 2020-21 school leavers in a positive initial destination was 95.5 per cent, which is up from both 2018-19 and 2019-20 figures. We are committed to continuous improvement, and our response to the review of the curriculum for excellence by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development that was published last summer will help ensure that.

**Jim Fairlie:** I recently visited Perth College of the University of the Highlands and Islands, and was blown away by the range of services and courses that it offers students and the wider community. However, one issue that was raised with me was the apparent lack of parity of esteem between vocational and academic pathways. Can the minister say what Government can do to strengthen the links between colleges and schools so that vocational opportunities are given the same level of support as academic ones?

**Jamie Hepburn:** I was very pleased to visit Perth College last year, and I was equally impressed.

I am conscious of the issue that Mr Fairlie has raised in relation to parity of esteem. I think that we are in a better place than we were previously due to the range of developing the young workforce services that we have in place. There is evidence of a year-on-year increase in the number of school leavers who have attained vocational qualifications at Scottish credit and qualifications framework level 5 and above since 2014. In 2013-14, 7.3 per cent of students achieved that but, by

2020-21, 26.1 per cent of school leavers were achieving it. That has happened on the basis of strong and effective school-college partnerships. Of course, there is more to do and our developing the young workforce activity will continue to take forward that journey of ensuring greater parity of esteem.

**Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con):** A key consideration set out by the curriculum for excellence is that it maximises opportunities for learning and creates clear links to future skills opportunities. However, the Audit Scotland report has highlighted how little progress has been made on skills alignment due to the lack of leadership and oversight by the Scottish Government. Does the cabinet secretary agree that the lack of progress on skills alignment is a major obstacle to maximising opportunities for learning?

**Jamie Hepburn:** I have literally just read out the figures on the significant progress that we have made on the creation of qualifications at school level. I take the leadership role that I have, and that the Scottish Government has, in relation to the alignment journey very seriously. That is why I engage regularly with the Scottish Funding Council and Skills Development Scotland to make sure that the matter is a focus of concerted activity.

We continue to take forward that programme through a range of means. Just recently, we set up a shared outcomes assurance group in Government that will involve both organisations operating to a framework, the details of which will be available soon. Just as the Auditor General suggested, we will reflect some of the findings in his report in the new letter of governance to the agencies, emphasising once again the importance of skills alignment.

#### **Children and Young People (Mental and Emotional Wellbeing)**

**4. Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what action is being taken in schools to promote the mental and emotional wellbeing of children and young people. (S6O-00775)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** We continue to prioritise support for mental health and wellbeing in schools. The mental health in schools working group recently developed a whole school approach framework to assist in supporting children and young people's mental health in schools. That complements earlier work to provide a professional learning resource for school staff to support the wellbeing of children and young people. We also continue to support our local authority partners with £16 million in funding to

ensure that every secondary school has access to counselling services.

**Fulton MacGregor:** During the pandemic, there has been an increase in the use of social media platforms as our young people have tried to stay connected with one another. Unfortunately, there have been reports that that has meant an increase in the levels of cyberbullying—something that has been raised in the past few weeks and months by a number of my constituents. The cabinet secretary will be aware that I have raised some very harrowing cases in the chamber. What action is the Scottish Government taking specifically to combat cyberbullying and the impact that it has on young people's mental health?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** Fulton MacGregor raises a very important point. I recognise the work that he has been doing on the issue for some time.

Online bullying should not be treated differently from face-to-face bullying and it is addressed effectively when it is part of our whole anti-bullying approach, not as a separate area of work. All of the Scottish Government's policies include advice on online bullying. There are specific experiences, outcomes and benchmarks in the technologies area of curriculum for excellence that allow an explicit reference to cyberresilience and internet safety, allowing schools to incorporate learning around those issues.

The Scottish Government also continues to fund respectme, Scotland's anti-bullying service, whose website contains information and practical advice for children and young people, and, importantly, for parents and carers, on dealing with online bullying.

#### **“Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence: Into the Future”**

**5. Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what the reasons are for its decision not to publish the draft of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report, “Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence: Into the Future”, that it received in January 2021. (S6O-00776)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** The OECD report, “Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence: Into the Future”, is an independent review carried out by an independent and internationally respected body. The timing of its publication was determined by the OECD. The report, which was published in full on 21 June 2021, backed curriculum for excellence, and the Scottish Government has accepted its 12 recommendations as part of our commitment to continuous improvement.

The Scottish Government has not released the draft report, as it is deemed to be subject to a

freedom of information exemption. The Scottish Government applied the exemption regarding confidential information obtained from another international organisation in good faith. We consider that to be an entirely valid approach. The OECD's code of conduct, which it applies to all publications around the world, prohibits the sharing of confidential material, and the draft report was clearly marked confidential.

**Oliver Mundell:** That is the stuff of fantasy. Has the cabinet secretary asked the OECD whether it would object to the release of the draft and, more importantly, the Scottish Government's response to it, which is, as I understand it, the property of the Scottish Government?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** I refer Mr Mundell to my original answer on the issue and to the OECD's code of conduct, which applies to all the publications that we have. The OECD is—*[Interruption.]*

I am afraid that Mr Mundell is not interested in the answer, but I will carry on for the sake of the rest of the chamber, who are interested. The OECD is an internationally renowned organisation and it has given an expert, trusted opinion to the Scottish Government. Fact checking ensures that reports and recommendations reflect the best and the agreed understanding. The UK Government takes the same approach, as has been seen with many reviews and reports in the past.

We will of course continue to take our freedom of information requirements exceptionally seriously, and we did so in this case. I believe that the FOI exemption that I have talked about with regard to international organisations has been the correct decision, and we applied the exemption on that point.

**Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):** Does the cabinet secretary agree that grandstanding on important educational issues has no place in the Parliament, and will she join me in thanking the OECD for its independent review of the curriculum for excellence? Does she agree that being open to external challenge is crucial to ensuring that our education system remains world class?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** I am happy to repeat my thanks to the OECD for its work, both in the most recent report and in the past. It is important that, as a country, we open ourselves up to scrutiny from internationally renowned and respected organisations such as the OECD. It is imperative that any Government, as part of its continuous improvement drive, invites the OECD to do that work and, importantly, acts on its recommendations, which we continue to do.

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** That was not fact checking. The Government wanted a

major rewrite. The report was not published before the election because John Swinney did not like its contents.

Communications from the Government to the OECD are owned by the Government, so the education secretary is perfectly entitled to publish them without anyone else's permission. She cannot hide behind the OECD. Will she just get on and publish?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** Rather than discrediting the Government with that question, Mr Rennie discredits the OECD. As I said, it is an internationally renowned organisation and its work in an educational setting is seen to be expert and trusted. The OECD was fully entitled to present its report to the Government to have it fact checked, but the idea that the Scottish Government can somehow manipulate an internationally renowned organisation such as the OECD to change its recommendations is fantasy from Mr Rennie. It absolutely discredits the OECD and the very commendable work that it has done.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Rona Mackay joins us remotely.

### Scottish Education Exchange Programme

**6. Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the development of the Scottish education exchange programme. (S6O-00777)

**The Minister for Higher Education and Further Education, Youth Employment and Training (Jamie Hepburn):** The development of a Scottish education exchange programme is a programme for government commitment and will help maintain Scotland's place as an outward-looking, internationally connected destination for work and study.

We are engaging with stakeholders from across the education spectrum, including higher and further education, community learning and development, youth work and adult education and schools and sports, and will develop the programme to ensure that it is fit for Scotland.

**Rona Mackay:** Stand International is a charitable organisation that is based in Kirkintilloch in my constituency. It regularly took disadvantaged young people on trips abroad under the Erasmus scheme, so sadly lost due to the United Kingdom Government taking us out of Europe. Does the minister agree that, if possible, our own exchange programmes should include young people from all backgrounds, who will benefit enormously from such life-enhancing trips?

**Jamie Hepburn:** If I recall correctly, I met Stand International along with Rona Mackay and Amy



Callaghan MP, and was pleased to do so. I am grateful to the organisation for the work that it undertakes.

I agree with the premise of the question. I believe that the replacement scheme that we take forward should be as encompassing as possible. It should have a particular slant towards supporting people from the most disadvantaged backgrounds in order to ensure that they have access to life-changing opportunities. One of my great regrets is that the Turing scheme has gone in exactly the opposite direction. Rona Mackay and other members have my commitment that, when we design our scheme, it will not follow suit.

### Education (Net Zero Targets)

**7. Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its plans for a flexible skills and education system that can help meet net zero targets, as referred to in its programme for government 2021-22. (S6O-00778)

**The Minister for Higher Education and Further Education, Youth Employment and Training (Jamie Hepburn):** The Scottish Government is already undertaking significant action to equip individuals with skills and training to meet the needs of a net zero economy. That includes the publication of the climate emergency skills action plan in December 2020, the launch of the green jobs workforce academy in August 2021 and a suite of green skills training projects that have been delivered through the national transition training fund over the past two years.

We are implementing our learning for sustainability action plan and are continuing to engage with young climate activists through the Teach the Future campaign.

**Dean Lockhart:** The number of green jobs in Scotland is declining. According to figures that were released last week by the Office for National Statistics, the number of jobs in the low carbon and renewable energy economy fell from almost 22,000 in 2019 to just over 20,000 last year.

The minister refers to the green jobs academy but, in giving evidence to the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, the Scottish Trades Union Congress highlighted that that is merely a website listing jobs. Will the minister confirm whether the green jobs academy is an academy with teachers providing training and other assets that we normally associate with an academy, or is it merely a website?

**Jamie Hepburn:** It is certainly more than merely a website. It ensures that we harness the capacity of the system that we have in place through the range of initiatives and measures that I have laid out to be responsive to the great challenge that we

have with climate emergency skills. I am pleased to say that, as of 17 February, nearly 5,000 users have accessed the resources that are available via the green jobs workforce academy.

Six months from the academy's launch, Skills Development Scotland will undertake a detailed impact assessment of it through information from and profiles of the users and sectors that have used it, which will help to inform the development of its next phase. I am sure that Mr Lockhart will take great interest in that.

### Scottish Survey of Literacy and Numeracy

**8. Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the reported comments of Glasgow City Council's new executive director of education regarding reinstating the Scottish survey of literacy and numeracy. (S6O-00779)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** We remain committed to teacher professional judgment as the means of assessing progress in the broad general education phase, through the annual achievement of curriculum for excellence levels data. National standardised assessments will continue to have a role to play in supporting that. As we set out in our response to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report last year, we will explore options for a sample survey approach to assessing progress across the four CFE capacities.

**Sandesh Gulhane:** Why is it so difficult for the cabinet secretary to reinstate that well-regarded survey? Any government that is serious about restoring educational standards would recognise that collecting and tracking the right data is essential to an evidence-based approach to education. Does the cabinet secretary accept that many parents and teachers will simply draw the conclusion that the Scottish National Party Government would rather hide its failings than make things better for our young people?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** With the greatest respect to Dr Gulhane, he is wrong on this issue. The reason why there have been changes is that a national survey provides us with greater information to ensure that we know what is happening in schools and local authorities. The SSLN—*[Interruption.]* I am afraid that Mr Mundell is, once again, not interested in the answer.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Cabinet secretary, hold on a second. Mr Mundell, you have shouted from a sedentary position on numerous occasions now. I have allowed you to get away with it to date, but that is enough. Please treat the answers with as much respect as the questions.

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** As I was saying, the SSLN did not provide data about performance at school or local authority level. When the data showed a decline in literacy and numeracy between 2014 and 2015, it was decided, as part of the national improvement framework work, to move to a census-based approach to allow us to monitor progress in literacy and numeracy in order to provide support where it was required at school and local authority level. That simply was not possible with a survey such as the SSLN.

I note that, in the 2015 OECD report—the OECD is getting quite a few mentions today—it said that the sample approach of the SSLN did not give national agencies enough evidence.

## Ports

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** The next item of business is a statement by Ivan McKee on building industrial clusters around Scotland's ports. The minister will take questions at the end of his statement so there should be no interruptions or interventions.

14:55

**The Minister for Business, Trade, Tourism and Enterprise (Ivan McKee):** Scotland has significant strengths in the industries of the future. In renewable energy and hydrogen, life sciences, financial services and fintech, quantum photonics, advanced manufacturing, digital and space, we have genuinely world-leading technology, underpinned by the excellence of our academic institutions. Although we have had significant success in building clusters of manufacturing excellence around those opportunities, we recognise that we have much more to do. The Government is committed to maximising opportunities across Scotland's regions, and in doing so, to creating high-paying jobs, delivering on our fair work agenda, ensuring that everyone is paid at least the real living wage, and meeting our ambitious net zero commitments. We will use all the tools that are at our disposal to deliver on those ambitions, including maximising exports and inward investment, building Scotland's indigenous business and supply chains to scale, leveraging public sector procurement, and supporting businesses with targeted support and investment.

Our vision is of a Scotland that has world-leading capabilities in the industries of the future. Our focus is on high-innovation, high-wage and high-technology opportunities. We are not interested in a race to the bottom in low-cost, low-wage and low-tech manufacturing. Our national strategy for economic transformation will clearly articulate our vision, and we recognise the key role of Scotland's ports and airports in delivering it.

Today, I want to update Parliament on the progress that we have made in the implementation of one initiative that will support delivery of this vision—our green ports model—and on how we have managed to secure significant additional investment in Scotland to upgrade port infrastructure and build clusters of manufacturing excellence that are fully aligned with our fair work and net zero commitments, on a partnership basis between the Scottish and United Kingdom Governments.

The UK Government has presented its free port model as a dividend of the economic vandalism that is Brexit. We reject that hypothesis. Free ports already exist in many European Union member

states, and indeed did so in the UK within the EU, until 2012. We are well aware of the reputation of some free ports globally, while also recognising their value, in other cases, in driving innovation and high-technology economic development.

This afternoon, I will set out our ambitions for and expectations of Scotland's green port model. I will explain why, after careful consideration, we engaged in intergovernmental dialogue on an equal footing with the UK Government to improve the free port model by introducing a tailored model for Scotland that delivers the Scottish Government's requirements, addresses concerns and ensures proper safeguards and enforcement measures.

Four principal factors resulted in the recent agreement with the UK Government. First, we negotiated a partnership in which the Scottish Government will have an equal say in decision-making and in delivery. That demonstrates our determination to ensure that the influence of devolved government is strong in collaborative dialogue with UK ministers. That was not on the table previously. Indeed, it is a model that can and should be used in other areas in which the UK has recently been all too willing to ride roughshod over the devolution settlement.

Secondly, we insist that bidders must set out clearly how they will embed fair work practices into how they, and the companies within the area, conduct business. That was not on the table previously. All applicants in Scotland will be familiar with the Scottish Government's ambitious policies on fair work. Specifically, they will all know about the features set out in the fair work first criteria. Naturally, applicants will want to refer to those criteria, considering how as robust a case as possible for designation can be set out.

We are crystal clear on this. Any bid that does not aim for the very highest standards in fair work practice, including payment of the real living wage, will not be supported by the Scottish Government. Our commitment to fair work is clear, and this programme will be an exemplar of how we will deliver it.

Thirdly, we insisted that applicants be required to set out robust plans on how they will contribute to Scotland's just transition to a net zero economy. We have been clear about the need for green ports to be an exemplar in the use of technology and innovation to decarbonise Scotland's economy, to incubate and foster clusters of new green technology and industries and to benefit wider supply chains in Scotland. The UK Government has now agreed to that requirement, which, of course, is all the more pressing in the aftermath of the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26—in Glasgow. Previously, that was not on the table.

Last month, ScotWind announced 17 projects. ScotWind will provide us with enough power for every home in Scotland and will create the opportunity for Scotland to build a world-leading offshore wind manufacturing and export sector. As highlighted in the strategic infrastructure assessment for offshore wind that was commissioned by the Scottish Offshore Wind Energy Council, which I co-chair, there needs to be greater collaboration between developers, the supply chain and the public sector to help to focus activity and investment in Scottish ports, and to help Scottish suppliers to grow and win offshore wind work. The green ports policy will support delivery of the crucial objective of securing more offshore wind contracts for Scottish ports.

My use of the word "green" is about more than semantics; it signals clearly to global investors our ambitions and our unique offering, along with our intention of cementing Scotland's already well-deserved reputation as a leading global environmental, social and governance and net zero investment destination. Anyone who engaged with investors during COP26 will be well aware of the significant opportunities that that presents for Scotland.

Finally, the UK Government has now decided to provide fair funding for Scotland. The agreement to invest up to £52 million to create two new designations means that the same set-up funding will be available for England and Scotland. That was not on the table before. Indeed, that funding is almost three times as generous as the funding package in the Secretary of State for Scotland's formal offer to me last autumn.

On the four criteria—fair work, net zero, funding and an equal say—the Scottish Government has secured everything that it sought in the negotiations. On that basis, we are content to proceed with the implementation of the green ports model in Scotland.

Operation of the model will include the Scottish Government providing investment support through non-domestic rates and land and buildings transaction tax. In addition, operators can expect a wider package of developmental support from Scotland's enterprise agencies, local authorities and others.

I have heard the criticism that the Scottish Government delayed discussions, somehow disadvantaging Scotland, but the contrary is true. Any delays were a consequence of the UK Government being slow to come to the table and slow to recognise our specific requirements. Thankfully, that situation was resolved towards the end of last year, which enabled the negotiations to conclude.

I will not shy away from the fact that the reputation of free ports around the world is mixed. Concerns have been expressed about deregulation and the risks of criminality, tax evasion and reductions in workers' rights. However, that is not a model or an approach to which the Scottish Government would agree. We are optimistic about the potential of the model, but we will remain vigilant and focused on firm monitoring and evaluation of progress on the ground. I have engaged with trade unions and others on the matter to ensure that their concerns are taken into account, and I will continue to do so.

As we will have an equal say in choosing the two designations in Scotland and in how they are governed subsequently, I can assure members that the Scottish Government will remain focused on ensuring that the highest standards of governance and probity are maintained. I also point to my confidence that our ports, local authorities, businesses and others that will submit applications will be similarly focused.

In that element of our partnership work with the UK Government, we will ensure that issues of compliance with the law, governance and management of performance are placed at the top of any hierarchy of priorities. I make it clear that that which is granted can also be recalled.

In addition to the issues that I have already covered, we are conscious of the need to avoid economic displacement within and from Scotland. Bidders will be required to make clear what assessments they have made of potential displacement.

Scotland's green port model is designed to support the development of innovative industries that are committed to developing new green technologies, supporting fair work opportunities and, crucially, embedding themselves in the local communities in which they are based. Further, we want the areas to assist the development of their regional economies and benefit wider national supply chains.

A full applicant prospectus is scheduled for publication next month. The selected designations will take part in a fair, rigorous, open and transparent process.

We look forward to considering all applications, in the expectation that they will serve to demonstrate the ambition, potential and commitment of the partnerships that assemble them—including local authorities, which are central to the bids that we expect to come forward.

The agreement delivers fair set-up funding for Scotland. It demonstrates the negotiating strength of the Government and the fundamental importance of fair work, payment of the real living

wage and net zero to the Scottish Government and to Scotland's future economy.

I will ensure that the Parliament is kept fully up to date as the matter progresses.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The minister will now take questions on the issues that were raised in his statement. I intend to allow around 20 minutes for that, after which we will need to move to the next item of business. I ask members who wish to ask a question to press their request-to-speak button or type R in the chat function, if they have not yet done so.

**Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** I thank the minister for advance sight of his statement. It was an extraordinary rewriting of history. No one has forgotten that, having described the very concept of free ports as "havens for criminality", the minister's desperation to find fault with anything that the UK Government proposes and his initial reluctance to deal have meant that Scotland came very close to missing out on investment that could bring—just as an example—22,000 jobs to the north-east, as well as an economic shot in the arm of £8.4 billion. People recall well that the mayor of Tees Valley said in December that people are investing in his area who would have invested in Scotland, had the minister backed free ports. It was only when the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy took personal control of the matter, saying that free ports would deliver a "major economic boost", that the position moved.

What we have just heard from the minister was grudging, negative and—dare I say it?—petulant, which is hardly surprising given that it is an open secret that he had to be persuaded, from within his own Government, of the enormous economic value of free ports. Does he really think that he can now, in good conscience, tell Parliament and industry that he is the minister who can make the free ports project a success?

Furthermore, what will he do proactively to ensure that Scotland is at the forefront of bids and to ensure that the negative and divisive language of his statement does not scare off potential investors?

Finally, the minister acknowledges that a whopping £52 million investment by the UK Government will make the two Scottish free ports a reality. Will the Scottish Government commit to matching the scale of that ambition for Scotland?

**Ivan McKee:** It is Liam Kerr who is rewriting history. The reality is that we have been clear on exactly where our red lines are throughout the process of extensive engagement that I have had with businesses, ports and others, as anyone whom he talks to will confirm. We have articulated that clearly. We identified the risks—as I did in my

statement and as I have done previously—around the free port model globally. We worked extensively, with the team in the Government and beyond, to understand the opportunities. I have, as I said, listened very closely to business throughout the extensive engagement on the process, over the past year and a half.

We have been clear about our red lines—on fair work, on the real living wage, on a commitment to net zero, on having an equal say in designation and on the UK Government putting in, in Scotland, funding that is equal to what it has put in in England.

It is the UK Government that has been slow to come back to the table. I wrote to the UK Government on 27 February 2021, but I got no answer. I wrote again on 5 March, but I got no answer, and again on 12 March, but I got no answer. I wrote again on 24 March—to try to get something away prior to the election period—but I got no answer. Immediately when I came back to Parliament on 11 May, I wrote to the UK Government, but I got no answer, and I wrote again on 22 June, but I got no answer. I wrote to the UK Government six times, and its silence was deafening.

I had a discussion with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Steve Barclay, back in February 2021—more than a year ago—when we had a deal laid out. However, for some reason the UK Government pulled the plug on that: the deal was supposed to have been announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rishi Sunak, in the budget in March 2021, but the UK Government pulled the plug. The UK Government has been disconnected internally on the issue. It has been unable to come to the table and has been unable to come to a negotiating position.

In contrast, the Scottish Government—including me, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy, the First Minister and others—has at every stage of the process been very clear and consistent about what would be required in order for us to agree to the green port model. As I have laid down, the red lines have not changed.

I am thankful that, in November last year, the UK Government came back to the table. It approached us and said that it wanted to reopen negotiations, because it recognised that our proceeding on our own with the green port model—which is exactly what we were on course to do, towards the end of last year—was a suboptimal solution for business in Scotland, and that it would look very stupid indeed had it not committed to the situation. That is the reality.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Minister, I ask you to wind up your response.

**Ivan McKee:** Finally, I say that we are absolutely committed to bringing foreign direct investment into Scotland. That is why, for seven years in a row, Scotland has been, and continues to be, the best-performing part of the UK in attracting foreign investment.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We have a lot of questions to get through, so I would appreciate more succinct questions—and, indeed, more succinct answers, minister.

**Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** I thank the minister for advance sight of his statement.

The ability of our two Governments to argue about almost every issue means that Scotland's ports find themselves months behind England's in developing free ports—or green ports, as the minister referred to them. There remains a lack of clarity on the fair work requirements. In his statement, the minister, somewhat vaguely, said that

“applicants will want to refer”

to fair work criteria and should

“aim for the ... highest standards in fair work practice”,

but it is not clear what, if anything, will be legally binding.

Will the minister say whether successful bids must include commitments on workers' rights, including the ability of trade unions to access sites and organise in green ports? Given that the minister has not even met trade unions that represent workers in Scotland's ports to discuss green ports, will he not only do that but confirm that application criteria on fair work will be legally binding and agreed with the trade unions?

We know that Green MSPs say that they do not support green ports. Can the minister confirm what the estimated total value of the Scottish Government's financial contribution will be to green ports and whether that funding was included in the recent Green-Scottish National Party budget?

Yesterday, Conservative MSPs ruled out supporting bids from about seven of the nine areas that have so far expressed interest in having green port status, including Cairnryan in my South Scotland region. Will the minister ensure that support for the economies of more peripheral areas, where there are, arguably, the biggest economic challenges, will be part of the application criteria?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I am conscious that the audio was not brilliant, but I hope that you got most of that, minister.

**Ivan McKee:** I got the gist of it.

We have been absolutely clear, in my statement today and throughout the process, that fair work and payment of the real living wage will be essential in any bids that come forward. As we have secured equal partnership with the UK Government in the decision-making process, we have signalled clearly that we will not support bids that do not meet those criteria. That is absolutely clear. We are very proud of the work that we are doing on conditionality, with regard to fair work and the real living wage. The green port model is absolutely part of that.

I have engaged with trade unions extensively throughout the process, through four meetings with trade union representatives and a separate meeting with a wider stakeholder group at which trade unions were present. Trade unions have been very much part of the process. I am very clear about their desire to protect workers' rights, to protect environmental and other standards and to see no degradation as a consequence of the model's operation. It is our ambition that the model will be not a race to the bottom but—as I said—a climb to the top. We are committed to continued working with trade unions to ensure that that is the case.

Colin Smyth raised the issue of displacement. As I said in my statement, we are conscious of that. We see this as an opportunity to attract into Scotland more investment, more business and additional jobs, not to move business around in Scotland. As I have said, bidders will be required to say what consideration they have given to the risk of displacement and how they will seek to mitigate that risk.

On the financial contribution, my colleague the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy will be working through the detail of that. Clearly, it will depend on the successful bids. The types of businesses in green ports will influence the extent of the reliefs that will be in place. That will be an issue not for this year's budget but for future years' budgets.

**Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP):** Can the minister provide more information on the economic incentives that will be provided to green ports to encourage business growth and economic development? Will scoring systems for the two locations fully consider local economic and social conditions?

**Ivan McKee:** The two green ports will benefit from a comprehensive package of support, including additional revenue support to establish governance structures and business plans; substantial seed capital for land assembly and infrastructure; reserve tax reliefs in respect of capital land and structures; national insurance

relief; customs easements; and devolved tax relief in respect of non-domestic rates and of land and buildings transaction tax.

On the plans and circumstances of the winning bids, we will also look closely at how mainstream economic development support from the Scottish Government and the enterprise agencies could increase the bids' impact on the ground. We will consider whether additional targeted support—for example, in skills development—could also supplement the package that is on offer.

I am happy to confirm that local economic and social conditions will be taken into account in assessing the strategic context for the bids, and that regeneration and job creation will be the lead objectives of the programme.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Jamie Halcro Johnston also joins us remotely.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** The statement claims that operators can expect a wider package of development support from Scotland's enterprise agencies, local government and others. Given that the Scottish Government has squeezed the budgets of our enterprise bodies and local councils, is the minister suggesting that additional money will be made available to them to fund support and, if so, how much? Given the progress that has been made elsewhere, can the minister confirm when, next month, the application prospectus will be published, when a request for bids will be opened and closed and what his projection is of when the winning bids will be effectively operational?

**Ivan McKee:** I thank Jamie Halcro Johnston for his question. Again, the sound quality was not great, but I think that I picked up the gist of it.

Funding from enterprise agencies and others will depend—as always—on the quality of the bids and how they comply with the scheme's strategic objectives and those of the enterprise agencies. Applications for future funding will be dependent on individual circumstances.

On the timing of the bid prospectus, we are working with the UK Government. The two partners will have an equal say on how we will move forward together. The full timetable will depend on both Governments agreeing on all aspects of the detail. That process is well in progress. I expect that the bid prospectus will be launched during the course of March and that, by the summer, bids will have been submitted, with decisions being made shortly thereafter.

At another time, I will be interested to hear Jamie Halcro Johnston's reflections on Liam Kerr's comment that the Conservative Party has decided to support the Aberdeen bid. I assume that is in

preference to bids from Orkney, the Shetland Islands or other areas in the region that the member represents.

**Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP):** As the minister said in his statement, it is important that steps are taken to avoid the possibility of green free ports displacing economic activity. Can the minister say any more about the steps that can be taken to ensure that green free ports make an additional contribution as opposed to displacing activity?

**Ivan McKee:** As I said, the Scottish Government will not support any bid that does not feature a clear and commitment to fair work practices, including the real living wage and other elements of the fair work first agenda. We are also very clear that we will look at the bids carefully in order to understand that displacement activity has been considered within the offers that come forward and that steps are in place to ensure that there are safeguards against the displacement of economic activity.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The next three speakers join us remotely.

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** I echo Colin Smyth's plea on behalf of peripheral communities where the benefits of these ports could have a far greater regional impact. When will decisions be made about where green free port status will be allocated and how will decisions and agreement be reached between the two Governments?

**Ivan McKee:** As I said, the process is moving forward at pace and both Governments are agreeing on the details as we take the matter forward. I expect the final two designations will be indicated later this autumn, once we have gone through the full process. The bill prospectus will lay out in detail how the process will be taken forward and how bids will be scored. That will be launched at some point in March.

I am well aware of the issues that have been raised. With this initiative, we are seeking to ensure that Scotland is able to compete on an international stage. The quality of the bids that come forward will be judged on that basis as well as against the other criteria that I have already identified. We are very conscious of the need to mitigate displacement and the impact that the model could have. That is why we are being very careful to guard against displacement activity.

**Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** Can the minister give any reassurance to ports not in the running to be designated as a free port that are concerned that they might be negatively affected by the scheme?

**Ivan McKee:** Businesses, ports and others have raised that concern with me. As I have said, we believe that what we are doing with the green port model is absolutely the right thing to do to put Scotland in a competitive position internationally. My priority is to ensure that the ports are beneficial to the national economy and wider supply chains throughout Scotland.

All ports are, of course, welcome to apply alone or in partnership. When we are clearer later in the year about where the two green ports will be, that will be the time to have a look at the impact of the designation and how it plays in the wider context across all Scotland's ports and in the wider ecosystem to ensure that, as Emma Roddick has said, ports that are not successful are supported to take forward their business expansion plans.

**Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green):** I thank the minister for the advance sight of his statement.

The minister will be aware of the Scottish Greens' very strong opposition to free ports. I will not rehearse all our reasons for that now, but I must make it clear that what we have heard today does not do enough to challenge the fundamental functions of free ports—that they facilitate and legitimise tax avoidance, poor labour conditions and environmental degradation. It is not enough that bids will

"aim for the very highest standards in fair work practice";

we must demand and require that companies meet those high standards. Our workers and trade unions deserve nothing less.

Are not the proposals just a UK Government Brexit project that has been greenwashed and that will result in tax avoidance and the loss of public resources and commons wealth to the private sector?

**Ivan McKee:** No. I know that the Greens support fair work and payment of the real living wage and accelerating conditionality to deliver that. The green port model delivers that. I know that the Greens are in favour of accelerating our move towards net zero and requiring businesses to come forward with plans to deliver on that. The green port model delivers that. I know that the Greens are in favour of building Scotland's industrial base so that we can benefit from the development of offshore wind in particular and other sectors and technologies that are focused on net zero. The green port model delivers that. I know that the Greens are in favour of supporting business where that makes sense to enable Scottish businesses to take advantage of those opportunities. The green port model delivers that. The model is also very clear about there being no degradation of worker rights or environmental standards.

Frankly, I am a bit perplexed about why the Greens do not support the green port model, given that it ticks all those boxes in respect of their requirements for such a model.

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** Does not the previous exchange show the complete irrelevance of the Greens in government and that they cannot have any influence over Government policy?

The Government has a shocking record in the area. It spent millions of pounds failing to save Burntisland Fabrications, but the site owner, InfraStrata, is now recruiting from abroad because the Government did not train enough workers to build the tiny number of turbine jackets that are being built in this country. Is the Government going to get anything out of the free port/green port deal, or will that simply be a repeat of the BiFab shambles?

**Ivan McKee:** We are hugely focused on delivering and maximising opportunities for Scotland from the policy and from other opportunities that present themselves as a result of the transition to net zero. I am working with my colleague Michael Matheson and heading up a working group that is looking to ensure that we can maximise the benefits for Scottish businesses and that they are well prepared with the capacity, capability and skills in place to take advantage of those opportunities as they come forward.

Skills development is absolutely key to the transition, of course. I do not need to rehearse—indeed, I do not have the time to list—all the Scottish Government's initiatives to ensure that we have the skills in place to support a fair transition to net zero. The green port model is another tool in the box and another opportunity for Scotland to further build on the very promising offshore wind sector and other sectors in the transition to net zero. That is what the model is focused on. It is taking forward that agenda, delivering for businesses, ports, communities and workers throughout Scotland, delivering on the fair work agenda, delivering on economic development, and delivering on the transition to net zero.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Three more members want to ask questions in a minute and a half. I am prepared to go over the time a little, but I repeat my plea for as succinct questions and answers as possible.

**Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP):** How will green ports contribute to the exporting infrastructure that an independent Scotland will need?

**Ivan McKee:** Our objective is to build Scotland's economy and make it as strong as possible so that, when we become independent, we have an economy that can compete internationally. Much

of that is already in place. The initiative will help to further cement that, enhance Scotland's international competitiveness in the key sectors that were identified in my statement, in which Scotland has genuine global advantage, and build our economy to face the net zero future. As such, the initiative provides an important platform and an opportunity for an independent Scotland.

**Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con):** Greenock, on the Clyde coast, has a long, proud and industrious history of maritime trade, with deep coastal waters, border checks and transport links. It already has much of the infrastructure that would be needed for a huge investment of the sort that we are discussing. We also desperately need jobs and investment. Would the Scottish Government support, in principle, a Clyde port bid of this nature? Would the minister work constructively with all parties to ensure that we can bring that much-needed opportunity to my region?

**Ivan McKee:** I thank the member for the very positive way in which he framed his question, unlike some of his colleagues. I would be delighted to work with him to look at the opportunities within his region, as I would be to work with ports across the country. I have met representatives from some and intend to visit others over the coming months. I am always open to constructive discussion to support Scotland's economic development.

I would be interested to know what Jamie Greene thinks of Liam Kerr yesterday committing the Conservative party to supporting the Aberdeen bid to the exclusion of all others.

**Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** It is important that green ports make a beneficial contribution to the Scottish economy by offering inclusive growth. Exactly how will growth be measured to ensure that the benefits are accrued to Scotland's balance sheet, given the complex supply chains that might be involved?

**Ivan McKee:** Ensuring that Scotland's wider supply chains benefit from the two new designated green ports will be of critical importance. Accruing that broad economic benefit is part of avoiding the displacement effect. The applicant prospectus will ask for commentary on bidders' plans in that respect.

I strongly agree that we must deliver benefits for the communities around the new sites. I want to see net new jobs being taken up by local people who will enjoy good pay, terms and conditions.



## Ukraine

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

The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-03333, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on solidarity with Ukraine. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons.

15:28

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** Today, we woke to the horror of an unprovoked invasion of Ukraine and to a reality that we all hoped had become unthinkable: a land war in Europe. Today, literally as we speak, that horror in Ukraine is intensifying.

Much discussion will rightly focus on the geopolitical impact but, as ever when so-called strongman leaders flex their muscles, it is the innocent and most vulnerable who suffer the most. At the sharp end of any conflict are men, women and children—civilians who have the right to go about their daily lives in peace but who will inevitably bear the brunt of this full-scale invasion. Many will be terrified and are fleeing. Our thoughts are with them in this darkest of hours and we must provide them with practical support, aid and refuge.

This is arguably the most serious moment that the world has faced since the end of the cold war and is one of the most dangerous since world war two. By launching this invasion of a sovereign independent nation, Vladimir Putin has committed an illegal act of aggression that has no conceivable justification. His warped rewriting of history underpinning his imperialist delusions is no justification. His claims about the actions of Ukraine's Government are false and offer no justification. Notwithstanding different opinions here and elsewhere about the role and objectives of NATO, his assertions about its so-called eastern expansion and threat to Russian security lack credibility. They are an excuse, not a reason, and they are certainly not a justification.

Putin's motives are simpler: imperialist expansion, coupled with a fear of allowing democracy to flourish on his borders in case it finds its way into Russia. If those are his motives, no one should doubt his ultimate intention. He wants to end Ukraine's very existence as an independent democratic state. This is, therefore, a moment of genuine peril, first and foremost for the people of Ukraine, but also for the world. It is a time for all democracies and all countries that believe in the rule of international law to stand up for Ukraine's sovereignty and to stand against Russian aggression.

That is why I believe that it is important for Parliament today to condemn Russia's actions unreservedly, to show solidarity with the people of Ukraine and to support Ukrainian sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. That is the right thing for all countries to do, but I know that, in expressing our solidarity with Ukraine, many of us are mindful of the strong ties between Scotland and Ukraine. As one example, our capital city, Edinburgh, is twinned with Ukraine's capital, Kyiv. There are several thousand Ukrainian citizens living here in Scotland, and they are valued and welcome members of our communities. For all of them, especially those who have family and friends still in Ukraine, this will be an especially anxious time. The Scottish Government will do all that we can to support them, and we will work with the Foreign Office to support inquiries from any in Scotland who may be worried about loved ones in Ukraine.

We are also working with the United Kingdom Government and the other devolved Governments to ensure that support is available if needed to Ukrainian British nationals who are returning to the UK. Yesterday, I discussed the concerns of Ukrainians in Scotland with both the acting consul general and with Linda Allison, the chair of the Ukrainian community here. I made clear to both of them the Scottish Government's condemnation of Russian actions and our support for, and solidarity with, the people of Ukraine.

In addition, I made it clear that Scotland stands with those members of the international community that have opposed Russian aggression by imposing sanctions. After all, expressions of solidarity with Ukraine, welcome though they are, are not sufficient in this moment of great peril. Firm and decisive action is needed, in particular because this week's atrocities by Russia are not isolated but part of a pattern of this Russian regime's aggression, which includes the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the Salisbury poisonings in 2018.

I refer to the Russian regime deliberately, because it is important to be clear that the crimes—I also use that word deliberately—that are now being committed by Putin should be laid at his door and at the doors of his kleptocratic cronies. They should not be laid at the door of the people of Russia wholesale, nor should they be laid at the door of Russians or people of Russian background who are now living here in Scotland.

However, those crimes cannot and must not go unanswered. We cannot have a situation—as arguably happened with Crimea—in which the world expresses shock and outrage for a period of time but then allows the Russian regime to consolidate its gains with relatively few consequences and go on to plan further

aggression. If we are to deter Putin this time, sanctions must hit him and his allies hard, with severe and lasting consequences. He must pay a heavy price for aggression.

I therefore welcome the European Union's intention to impose a package of what it calls "massive and targeted sanctions", the detail of which we should learn tonight. The UK will, sadly, not now be in the room when those sanctions are being discussed and decided but, as the Estonian Prime Minister said this morning,

"The most effective response to Russia's aggression is unity,"

so I hope that we will see co-ordinated action across the international community.

We welcome the sanctions that the UK Government announced on Tuesday but, as I said at the time, those measures against just five banks and three individuals were too limited. In my view, there is no case at all to delay tough action now. The experience of recent years has shown that softer action does not encourage better behaviour on the part of Putin; it simply emboldens him in his aggressions.

The UK Government must therefore announce further and much more significant steps as quickly as possible, and I am hopeful that it will do so. We must also address the fact—it is a fact—that the City of London is awash with Russian money. The UK Government's response must therefore include a ruthless and comprehensive attack on the wealth and assets of the Russian regime and its backers. That demands a serious and systematic approach, and the Scottish Government will strongly support further moves by the UK Government in that direction.

The Scottish Government will also work with the UK Government and other partners, including the UK National Cyber Security Centre, in staying vigilant against any direct threats that Russia might present to Scotland, for example through cyberattacks. The National Cyber Security Centre is closely monitoring the threat to the UK as a priority and, in recent weeks, in addition to receiving briefings from the national security adviser, I have participated in four-nations discussions on how we deal with a range of domestic impacts that we might experience.

The crisis is fundamentally about Russian aggression against Ukraine but there is also a far wider international and moral dimension to it. Putin wants to dismember—essentially, to obliterate—Ukraine as an independent democratic nation. If he is allowed to get away with his aggression, the international community will have failed and that failure will give encouragement to other countries and other so-called strongman leaders who consider acts of aggression in future.

Therefore, the crisis is a test for all nations. It is a test of how prepared we are to support not just the principle but the reality of an international order based on law, rules and peaceful coexistence. It is a test of how prepared we are to protect freedom, peace and democracy. All of us must speak out against Putin's aggression and stand up for the values of democracy, sovereignty, territorial integrity and peace. We must do so first and foremost as the best chance of deterring aggression against Ukraine and standing in solidarity with its people but we must do it also for the sake of other countries across the world and for the sake of our world.

We must not accept this as a moment that bloody and prolonged war returns to our continent. Today, Parliament can add Scotland's voice to all of those that are now standing up for peace, freedom and democracy. We can add this Parliament's and Scotland's voice to the voice of all those who stand with the people of Ukraine in this darkest of hours. For that reason, with a sombre sense but with pride, I will move the motion in my name and I urge all members to support it with one voice.

I move,

That the Parliament offers its unqualified support for Ukrainian sovereignty, democracy, independence and territorial integrity; condemns unreservedly Russia's violation of Ukraine's sovereignty by recognising the so-called Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic, and expresses its concern at the disturbing reports of Russian forces beginning a further invasion of Ukraine's territory, in flagrant violation of international law; acknowledges the response to date of the international community in applying sanctions against the Russian regime and calls on it to redouble such efforts to discourage Russia from further aggression; further acknowledges the limited sanctions announced by the UK Prime Minister and urges that these should go further as soon as possible, with severe sanctions imposed upon Putin's regime, his oligarch backers and their assets globally; supports efforts to deter Russia from further aggression and efforts to require Russia to reverse its illegal and provocative actions; records its concern about the grave threat to the safety and security of Ukrainian citizens; stands in solidarity with the people, Government and Parliament of Ukraine, and Scotland's Ukrainian community, and stands ready to support them in any way Scotland can.

15:37

**Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):**

I confirm that the Scottish Conservatives will support the Government motion, because it is essential that we come together to condemn Russian aggression.

The news that we woke up to this morning—that Russian troops had entered Ukraine, that cruise missiles and military aircraft had attacked its major cities and that military and civilian lives had already been lost—can only be described as

utterly devastating. It was utterly devastating for the people of Ukraine who find themselves the victims of an irredentist dictatorship and its warped view of the world, and utterly devastating for the rest of our continent, as the peace in Europe that we have all taken for granted was shattered by the most serious conflict for decades.

There must now be the swiftest and strongest response from the United Kingdom and every nation that values democracy and international law to make the action as costly as possible for Russia and especially for the regime that has ordered the invasion. That is why I welcome the Prime Minister's statement that the United Kingdom will introduce a massive package of further economic sanctions to hobble the Russian economy. As our debate closes at 5 o'clock tonight, the Prime Minister will make a statement in the UK Parliament setting that out in more detail. We need a similar response from all our allies and partners, and I welcome those that have already been made.

Beyond that, the United Kingdom Government has provided substantial assistance to Ukraine throughout the crisis. That includes training for more than 21,000 members of its armed forces; a security assistance package to increase Ukraine's ability to defend itself, including antitank missiles; £1.7 billion of financial support to help to develop and expand the Ukrainian navy; £88 million to support the Ukrainian economy and reduce its reliance on Russian gas; and £40 million to fight corruption and strengthen the Ukrainian judiciary.

However, it is clear that, despite those actions, Putin is determined to continue the conflict regardless of the cost to the people of Ukraine and, indeed, the people of Russia. Therefore, we must realise that we no longer live in a world in which we can assume rationality and reason in our international affairs. For years, we believed that conventional warfare between two sovereign countries would never happen again, because it was unthinkable that anyone could actually want war. However, as we have seen today, that belief in a rules-based international system, in which countries negotiate disputes rather than resort to conflict, is no longer an assumption that we can rely on. The world has become a more dangerous place than it was yesterday, and we view with trepidation what tomorrow might bring.

That is why it is important that we stand with our NATO allies, particularly those in eastern Europe. Countries such as Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are former parts of the Soviet Union that the Russian regime still considers part of its sphere of influence. In other countries, such as Poland and Romania, which border Ukraine, the citizens are now living in fear of an escalation of the conflict and further Russian aggression. The UK has

already made major commitments to the security of those states, but it is important that we now redouble those efforts and reaffirm our article 5 commitment that an attack on any NATO member is an attack on all members.

Here in the UK, we must also make every effort to tackle Russian disinformation and close loopholes in our financial system that allow Russian oligarchs and state-owned companies to circumnavigate sanctions.

Other dictatorships across the world will be studying our response to the crisis and testing our resolve. We need to strengthen our military and take difficult decisions economically to isolate rogue states such as Russia, because if we and the rest of the democratic world do not defend our rules-based international system and do not champion liberal values, no one else will.

However, it is important today that we do not give any impression that we have written off the Ukrainian people. There can be no hint that we or the rest of the western world have abandoned them to Russian aggression, because at the heart of this conflict is the right of a democratic country to choose its destiny.

Although we were all shocked by the violence today, we must remember that that conflict has been going on for years. As the First Minister said, in 2014, after the Euromaidan protests removed a corrupt pro-Kremlin regime, Russia annexed Crimea and supported separatists in the Donbas region in their war with Ukraine. That war alone has claimed 14,000 lives to date and devastated a region that was previously the industrial heartland of the country.

Now the Ukrainian people face the darkest day in their history for a generation, and we must continue to offer them our full and unwavering support in any way that we can as the conflict continues. That must mean continued supplies and equipment to help them to defend themselves and their country. It must also mean humanitarian aid and shelter for those people who are already fleeing or attempting to flee the cities. The 20,000 Ukrainian nationals who call the UK their home, and might have family and friends at risk because of this truly awful war, should know that they are also in all our thoughts and prayers.

When I woke this morning, like many, I felt shocked by what I was seeing on the news: horrific scenes of cruise missiles hitting apartment blocks, tanks rolling over border posts and thousands fleeing Kyiv in their cars. Those images, which belong in the past and should have been unbelievable in the 21st century, have become reality again today. I also felt a deep sadness that the peace in Europe, which was won by the blood of our grandparents and the

generations that went before us, has broken once more. Our children will grow up in a less secure and safe world.

The people of Ukraine are having their freedom to choose their national destiny taken away by a foreign autocratic dictatorship. Many of them will lose their lives in the conflict or carry the physical and emotional scars with them for ever.

We on the Conservative benches join the rest of this Parliament and the UK Parliament in condemning in the strongest possible terms Vladimir Putin's decision to invade Ukraine. It is important that the whole UK is united in the action that we will have to take in the coming days, weeks and months to stand up to this renewed era of aggressive expansionism, irredentism and great power politics, and absolutely ensure that liberalism, democracy and international law triumph once again. We stand with the people of Ukraine and we support the motion in the name of the First Minister.

15:44

**Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab):** Earlier this afternoon, the leaders of all Scotland's political parties sent a unified and unambiguous message: Vladimir Putin's attack on Ukraine is unprovoked and unjustifiable. Our solidarity with the Ukrainian people is unconditional. We must stand ready to support Ukraine as it defends itself against Russian aggression.

Today is a dark today, and it is important that we pause to recognise the scale of what has happened. A hard-won and fragile peace in Europe has been shattered by a despotic Russian regime that has made clear that it will disregard the values that one would expect of the international system in order to advance its imperial ambitions.

There are no excuses for Putin's actions. What Putin's regime fears is a democratic Ukraine. He fears a neighbour that makes decisions free from his corrupting influence. The Russian President is attempting to dismember Ukraine, and he must fail.

The international community must be united in its condemnation and its action. We must all stand firm in our support for Ukraine and support the freedom of the Ukrainian people. Our first actions must now be to support them with urgent humanitarian assistance. The cost of war in human lives and in unimaginable and preventable human suffering cannot be wished away. However, we can act to minimise the great evils that are unleashed by the Russian state's aggression. We can help the destitute, those who flee violence and those whose health—physical and mental—is put at risk by war. Those who flee

their homeland to escape the violence that has been unleashed upon them must be able to find sanctuary here. In Scotland and across the United Kingdom, we cannot shy away from our moral responsibility to those who are displaced.

Internationally, the UK must urgently reinforce our NATO allies. The hardest possible sanctions must be imposed against all those who are linked to Putin. Financial sanctions must be swift. Putin's regime is sustained by its access to a global financial system that allows it to trade its goods and conduct its economic affairs. However, membership of that system is dependent on being a member of the international community of good standing—on being one who observes the rules. That is clearly no longer the case with Russia. Russia must be immediately excluded from financial mechanisms, such as SWIFT—the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication—and we should ban trading in Russian sovereign debt.

Putin's campaign of disinformation and destabilisation has long sought to undermine our shared public understanding of the world. We know, following the publication in 2020 of the Russia report by the UK Parliament's Intelligence and Security Committee, that Russia has interfered in elections and referendums across the United Kingdom. Despite that, too many in Scottish and British public life continue to be comfortable turning a blind eye to the Kremlin's corrosive influence. Shamefully, that list includes a former First Minister of Scotland. The tolerance that has been shown to those operations must end now.

This must be a turning point. We need an end to oligarch impunity. We need to draw a line under Companies House providing easy cover for shell companies and ensure that our money-laundering laws are enforced. We need to crack down on spies. We have to ensure that money is not pouring into UK politics from abroad. We have failed to stop the illicit flow of Russian finance into Britain and the influence of Russian money on our politics and public life. That must end, and it must end now.

There is no doubt that any action will be met with a response from the Russian regime. Vladimir Putin will seek to divide us. He will try to divide allies in Europe from one another. He will try to divide Ukrainians from their neighbours and sow the seeds of ethnic conflict. He will even try to divide us here in the United Kingdom—but we must pull together. Across the world today, the message is clear, and let that message be clear from this Parliament today, too. Peace and democracy will prevail. Vladimir Putin will fail.

15:49

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** I rise to offer the Government motion this afternoon the unconditional support of the Scottish Liberal Democrats. I am very grateful to the First Minister for making time for the debate.

Today, the world is a little darker, the outlook a little bleaker and our understanding of the future a little less certain. It is at moments such as this that this chamber and Parliament are at their best, when we speak with one voice in solidarity with a sovereign people who are fighting for their lives, and in condemnation of the expansionist aggression of a hostile power led by a dictator—in this case, a power that has already perpetrated the first ever use of chemical weapons on British soil.

Today, we join Parliaments around the world in expressing outrage and sharing our commitment to democracy, sovereignty and the rule of law.

As on every day in this place, we have the immense privilege and the sovereign duty to speak on behalf of the Scottish people. As part of that duty, we must now condemn the Russian aggression in the strongest possible terms and say with our shared voice that we stand firmly on the side of the Ukrainian people and against the actions of Vladimir Putin, backed by his hosts of oligarch puppets.

As I dropped my daughter off at school this morning, we stopped to watch her classmates playing in the snow. I was brought up short by the stark contrast of that scene with the threat that hangs over the head of every Ukrainian child on this day. How fortunate we are to live in a country where the parents of my daughter's classmates do not have to wake up to the sound of air raid sirens and fear the threat of bombardment, as parents in Kyiv did this morning.

As we watch events unfold in Ukraine over the coming hours and days, let us remember that many of the thousands of innocent citizens who are endangered are children. Edinburgh, as we have heard, is twinned with Kyiv. Now, in their hour of need, that relationship must stand for something: we in Scotland must prepare to offer Ukrainians fleeing their homes safe harbour in the villages and towns of Scotland.

By violating the territorial sovereignty of a democratic state, the Russian regime has broken the international laws that have prevented multinational conflict on the continent of Europe since world war two. There is nothing trivial about the situation and nothing legitimate about it. It cannot be justified. It is a grave threat to the safety of the people of Ukraine and to the international order on which the peace of our world depends.

This week, the Russian President described Ukraine as an American colony run by a “puppet regime”. Let us be abundantly clear in this place—in this democracy—that Ukraine is a sovereign democracy with a Government legitimately elected by the Ukrainian people. With his actions today, we should be in no doubt that Putin and his gangsters are holding us all in contempt. They are treating all that we value most—liberty, democracy and the rule of international law—as if they were immaterial rules in some playground game; rules that in Putin's mind do not apply to him.

The Conservative Government at Westminster must now hobble Russian financial interests in the UK. Such aggression will not be matched by the confiscation of a football tournament final. This week, my colleague at Westminster Layla Moran MP used parliamentary privilege to read out the names of 35 Russian oligarchs listed by Alexei Navalny as being linked to the dangerous Russian regime. We believe that it is time for the UK Government to look closely at that list. Immediate action must be taken to freeze and begin to seize the assets of anyone who is found to be one of Putin's enablers, and then to expel them from this country. It is also more vital than ever that we do all that we can to push back against the flow of Russian disinformation, so we should all commit to not participating in broadcasts by Russia Today or any other Russian state broadcasters.

I close by recognising that there will be millions of Russians who greet today's news with the same horror that we all do. We must recognise them, because they do not enjoy the same rights as us to demonstrate that horror freely. For 20 years, they have been denied freedom of press, freedom of expression and even the most fundamental human rights, especially in the LGBTI community. Today, let us stand in solidarity with them, too.

Above all, let us say to our brothers and sisters in the sister city of Kyiv, “We hold you in our hearts, we stand with you and we will not abandon you.”

15:54

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** As events in Ukraine unfold, minute by minute, the appalling and occasionally unhinged announcements from Russia's capricious President mean that we cannot know his endgame. Putin's comments on Ukraine's very right to exist, which mirror those of Hitler decades ago in relation to Czechoslovakia, Poland and the former Soviet Union, make one wonder whether it is the extirpation of Ukrainian sovereignty itself.

This is a day of infamy for the people of Ukraine. Putin's tanks are rolling; bombs rain down from Russian fighter jets; and Putin's navy is shelling,

too, in what is nothing short of a full-scale, illegal military invasion—one that the duplicitous Kremlin regime denied would take place.

At least 40 Ukrainians have already been killed, including a 15-year-old in his own home, and others are dying as we speak. While Putin lies about only targeting military infrastructure, footage from Kharkiv shows otherwise. This is a real war, with Ukrainian civilians at high risk. Even the Chernobyl nuclear plant is under attack.

I know that all our thoughts are with the victims and their families. Heartbreaking as it is to see the smoke billowing on our TV screens, we must watch, we must act, and we must pay tribute to the resilience, resolve and courage of Ukraine and her people.

It is surreal to hear academics and professors such as Maria Avdeeva, the research director of the European Expert Association, which identifies and analyses disinformation, who, sitting in her living room declared with the greatest dignity that she would not leave her hometown. Maria and her friends have trained in territorial defence units, and they will defend their country with everything that they have against this unprovoked attack on their freedom—because they must.

In addition to physical warfare, there have been disconcerting reports of so-called wiper attacks, to which hundreds of bank systems and other organisations in Ukraine are being subjected. Those cyberattacks are designed to completely and irreversibly wipe out Government and financial data, electrical grids and other important infrastructure in order to completely destabilise all of Ukraine.

Putin's ludicrous declarations of independence—I saw no glorious speeches by putative presidents or ceremonies at supposed events in Luhansk and Donetsk—give the lie to the idea that those areas of Ukraine declared independence at the behest of what commentators mistakenly call separatists. In fact, Russia inspired, led, armed, trained and funded the militias there, not to create new nations but ultimately to annex those regions—integral parts of Ukraine—to Russia itself.

Sadly, the long-enduring Russian people will suffer from the excesses of their despotic President, from economic hardship to the loss of young Russian soldiers who will inevitably die in Ukraine. In the beleaguered, bewildered and terrified communities of Ukraine, that suffering will be greatly magnified. Their military is no match for Russia's, and Putin had the element of surprise, as he chose when, where and how hard to strike.

A protracted guerrilla war is likely. In the 1940s, after the second world war, anti-Soviet Ukrainian partisans inflicted thousands of casualties on their

opponents, who suffered higher fatality rates than in Afghanistan four decades later—a protracted insurgency that only ended after 400,000 Ukrainians were deported to Siberia and a further 200,000 were executed.

After the brutal Nazi occupation, Ukraine fought the Soviets because it had vivid memories of Stalin's Holodomor, the genocidal terror famine that killed between 4 million and 7 million Ukrainians in the early 1930s, accompanied by the annihilation of Ukraine's intelligentsia, traditional elite and even almost its entire Communist Party leadership.

Is it any wonder that, on 1 December 1991, in a turnout of 84.2 per cent, 92.3 per cent of Ukrainian voters—28,804,071 voters—voted for independence? It is that overwhelming democratic mandate, including an 84 per cent pro-independence vote in both Donetsk and Luhansk, that former KGB man Putin ignores and despises.

What to do, Presiding Officer? The days of sending in the Scots Guards are firmly behind us. Clearly, strong diplomatic condemnation that is accompanied with direct and severe economic sanctions must be immediately imposed. From a ban on Aeroflot flying to western countries to the freezing of assets—Russian state and oligarchic—and a cessation of Russian imports, every peaceful avenue must be brought to bear to pressurise Putin. If the west does not stand firm, a watching China could consider Taiwan fair game.

Providing humanitarian assistance to Ukraine is essential, and we must be prepared to welcome some of the inevitable tide of Ukrainian refugees who will flee west from the horrors of war. Covid has hit Russia hard with 350,000 official deaths and falling living standards, which has no doubt played a part in Putin's warped thinking. Despots like foreign adventures to distract their people and shore up support, as bombs fall, people die, children cry and millions are in shock.

Russia must cease its attacks now. Resolute diplomacy, strong sanctions, international law and peace must prevail.

15:59

**Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con):** Like many other members in the chamber, I was shocked and dismayed when I woke this morning to discover the overnight change in the situation in Ukraine. Filling our television screens, on every channel, were images of Ukrainian refugees fleeing their homes, Russian tanks crossing the border into Ukraine, bombers streaming over Ukrainian cities and children crying in the streets. Those are scenes that we have not seen in Europe for a generation; they are sights that

sadden and dismay and which I had hoped that we would never have to witness again.

The situation is continually evolving and, as I came out of committee, I was met with the news that Putin's missiles were falling on residential areas that are home to innocent civilians, who did not ask for this war.

In what can only be described as a chilling statement last night, the Russian President warned us away from involvement in Ukraine. However, if he thinks that his threats will put us off, he is mistaken. If anything, they make Ukraine's allies more determined than ever. We saw that in the unified international response last night, with the UK imposing a range of strict sanctions that target the Russian Government and its supporters and are already doing a considerable amount of damage to the Russian economy.

**Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP):** I thank Sharon Dowey for giving way and agree with her sentiments. The Westminster Parliament's Intelligence and Security Committee, which has already been alluded to, produced a Russia report that many people would see as a blueprint for imposing the very kind of financial sanctions that the member refers to. Would she support the implementation of that report's recommendations in full to achieve those aims?

**Sharon Dowey:** I think the member knows that we will be putting in more sanctions. There is also a bill going through, so that the Parliament can investigate things further—I think that the member might be aware of that.

It is not often that we agree on things in this chamber, but, today, we stand firm in a show of unity to our friends in Ukraine.

The links between our two countries are deep and long-standing. Ukrainians first arrived in Scotland in the 1750s, many studying at the universities in Glasgow and Edinburgh. Following them came a wave of their countrymen, fleeing the oppression of the Russian empire, just as Ukrainians are doing today. Many of those refugees arrived on Lothian Coal Company ships, settling in Midlothian, Ayrshire, Lanarkshire and Glasgow.

This conflict will only displace more people. Some estimate that it could displace up to 5 million people, which would be the largest refugee crisis in Europe since the 1990s. We must offer them our support, just as we did in the 1940s, when Ukrainian members of the Polish armed forces came to Scotland. Some eventually stayed and made their home here.

What can we do this time? That question has been asked many times already, and there is an answer. We can supply aid, whether financial or

medical, and we could use the Scottish Government's humanitarian emergency fund to help. People displaced by the conflict will require warm winter clothing and medicines. They will need food, sleeping bags, shelter and all the other things that are needed to survive the cold. Scotland can play a role in support of the UK's overall effort.

We must take care not to forget that this is Putin's war and not that of the Russian people. This morning, I was contacted by a young Russian man who is currently in a city in Russia. He told me:

"The people of Russia do not approve of what is currently happening in Ukraine. We do not want to live behind an iron curtain for the next 20 years trying to re-establish diplomatic relationships with the West and restore our economy. It is hard to imagine what is happening in Ukraine right now, but it is also not easy to wake up and be on the side of the aggressors in a military conflict. But this is what we now have due to the ambitions of one man who wants to restore the borders of the Soviet Union. Western countries can affect what is happening. The safety and future wellbeing of the Ukrainian and Russian peoples are worth the effort."

His view is shared by hundreds of thousands of people across Russia who are sick of the propaganda, the nuclear sabre rattling and the rigged elections. Instead, they just want democracy—something that we take for granted. They are the Russians who we see bravely filling the streets of Moscow to protest, despite the threat of beatings, imprisonment or worse. People of that young man's generation are the only ones who are capable of bringing about meaningful change in Russia in a revolution without bloodshed. However, for them to do so, they need our continued support.

In the Prime Minister's statement earlier today, he had a clear message for the Ukrainians, which deserves repeating. He said:

"we are on your side."

To that, I add: we will support you. Together, we will defeat Putin.

16:05

**Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP):** This morning's news of the invasion of Ukraine brings fear to generations who only know of war in Europe as history, and we all feel the dread of what will happen and what the response and any further escalation will mean.

What is done in peacetime to shore up alliances matters and the strength of that will be proven in the days to come. The invasion of the sovereign internationally recognised territory of Ukraine is a breach of international law and is to be condemned.

I want to focus on the people of Ukraine: the mothers who fear for their sons; the sons who fear for their mothers; those who have faced conflict in Donetsk and Luhansk since 2014; those fleeing Kyiv this morning in that steady stream of blinking red lights as cars formed the exodus; and the families with children in those cars who are afraid and in flight.

To the many Ukrainians I have met here in Scotland, I say, we want you to know that the Scottish Parliament will stand in support of you.

An estimated 4 million Ukrainians live in Russia, made up of 2 million permanent residents and 2 million temporary workers who have been told to leave. That is above those who are living in peril in Ukraine. It needs a massive international response. In previous conflicts, the Scottish Government has moved swiftly to offer help to refugees and we must work with the UK and EU to do so again.

I appeal to the UK Government to rethink its Nationality and Borders Bill because it will make it harder for people who are under threat in Ukraine and other areas to obtain asylum.

Humanitarian aid needs to be mobilised swiftly. Ukraine is the bread basket of Europe. The realities of food shortages must be prepared for and planned for now internationally as grain silos are reported as being bombed today.

President Putin's sense of grievance at the collapse of the former Soviet Union is no justification for an imperialistic invasion destroying a peace in Europe that, however fragile, has prevailed for 70 years. This is the Kremlin's war, not the Russian people's war. The Russian people should have freedom and real democracy, and we need to support those who seek to champion the people over the Kremlin.

The pride and belligerence of empires in decline can prove to be very dangerous but we must guard against those qualities elsewhere. Democratic interference, as evidenced by the Westminster Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament's Russia report, financial donations and the hosting of dirty money laundering must be hit head on. The UK's democratic back door was left open to the Russians, but the front door was also opened, with generous entrance fees accepted. That weakens the UK Government's influence just when we need it to act, and when support and respect for the international rule of law needs to be upheld and championed in the strongest of terms.

The UK Government needs to implement the recommendations of that report, expel the oligarchs, freeze the assets and enforce the hardest of economic sanctions, and it must do so swiftly. We need firm diplomacy. NATO's response

is loaded with consequences, meaning and interpretation, and its statement from this morning carefully states that Russia will pay a heavy economic and political price.

I return to the people of Ukraine. In 2016, I welcomed to the Scottish Parliament one hero of the 2014 Ukrainian Maidan revolution who galvanised the crowds at that time, the actor turned activist turned culture minister Yevhen Nyshchuk. Where are he and his family today? Wherever they are, on this darkest of days, we say, and say together, that this Parliament stands by Ukraine.

16:09

**Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green):** Today, we are witnessing the greatest crisis on our continent since the end of the second world war. If the story of the latter half of the twentieth century was the gradual progress of democracy over various stripes of authoritarianism, then sadly the story so far across the globe this century has been the opposite.

One man is responsible for the terrible crime that is being committed against the people of Ukraine today, but it is a failure of the international community and the structures that we built from the ashes of the second world war that has meant that he has been able to take that catastrophic step.

Ukraine is a sovereign, democratic nation whose people have the inalienable right to self-determination. It is a European nation, as its people have made clear by majority vote time and time again in recent years.

Putin's claim that his invasion is intended to de-Nazify the country is not only offensive; it is plainly ridiculous when it is directed at one of the only nations on the planet to have simultaneously had a Jewish president and Prime Minister.

It was incumbent on Ukraine's allies, such as the UK, to object after 2014, when the Azov Battalion, an explicitly neo-Nazi paramilitary, was integrated into the regular Ukrainian army. That was a propaganda coup for the Kremlin. However, that does not alter the fact that Ukraine is a liberal democracy with one of the most electorally marginalised far-rights in Europe. The real fascists here are those in the Kremlin and their puppets in the Donbas. Every democratic nation, especially those in Europe, must stand with Ukraine today.

I am proud that the most consequential economic response that has been taken so far has been the one taken by my Green colleague Robert Habeck, Germany's Vice-Chancellor, who has finally terminated the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline. Much of the weakness in Europe's approach to



Russia over the past two decades has been driven by our dependence on Russian gas, which is a consequence of the failure to transition to clean, green domestic energy production. Transitioning from fossil fuels to renewables is not just about the climate; for our continent, energy independence is a key issue of collective and national security.

However, it is clear that far greater sanctions than that are now required. All transactions with Russian state-backed entities or those that are owned by close associates of the Kremlin must be banned. Accounts and assets that are held by Russian elites here in the UK should be audited and those that cannot be legally accounted for seized. That should have started happening years ago. Any Russian banks or companies that are connected to Russia's arms industry should also have their assets seized and be banned from operating internationally. We should not just take those steps unilaterally. The UK, France, Germany and others must co-ordinate our diplomatic efforts to persuade other nations across the world to follow us.

The list that I have given is far from exhaustive. The UK is a tax haven and a centre of global money laundering, as other members have said. Domestic anti-corruption efforts here will hurt Putin's associates. We must clean up Companies House, impose transparency on offshore ownership of property, resource the agencies that investigate financial crime and audit all foreign donations to political parties.

Severe economic sanctions will have consequences here, too. We should acknowledge that and plan for how we will support those who are worst affected, but the consequences of failing to act would be far worse. This will not stop in Kyiv. The UK and the US may be hypocrites when it comes to wars of aggression and respect for sovereignty, but hypocrisy is no excuse for a failure to act when innocent people are dying.

Last year's humanitarian catastrophe in Afghanistan cannot be repeated in Ukraine. The UK must follow the lead of countries such as Ireland and Moldova and stand ready to welcome refugees who flee the conflict, especially those who would be most at risk under a Russian occupation, such as journalists and LGBT people.

I want to raise the case of a constituent who is already caught up in the crisis. I have been working with Marie McNair and Amy Callaghan MP in an effort to arrange the safe return of a mother with settled status and her baby with British citizenship from visiting family in Belarus. They have made it as far as Lithuania but are being denied travel back to the UK, their home, as a result of one of the many administrative deficiencies in the Home Office system. They cannot return to Belarus for fear of being stuck

there indefinitely, given the policies of the regime in Belarus and the extensive involvement of that country's Government in Russia's invasion operations.

The situation has been highly distressing for my constituent. When the mother phoned my team from the airport, she was in tears, having been rejected from yet another flight, as she was unable to prove her right to be in the UK. The Home Office has given her an appointment to make her case for urgent support in two weeks. That is not to say that they will get urgent support in two weeks; they will simply have the opportunity to present documents to make the case for it.

A mother and a baby are being expected to live in an airport for two weeks until the UK Government considers whether it might help them to return home. We are talking about a legal UK resident and a British citizen. If that is how the UK Government treats a British resident and a one-year-old, it leaves me deeply concerned about how ready we are to support the many Ukrainians who, sadly, will now be forced to flee here.

Today's show of solidarity must not be a one-off. If the conflict becomes drawn out, we cannot become numb to it, as too many did with conflicts in Syria, Iraq and elsewhere. *Khay zhyve Ukrayina—long live a free and independent Ukraine.*

16:14

**Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP):** I sincerely hope that the Scottish Parliament will unite this evening in solidarity with the people of Ukraine after their country was attacked this morning by the sleekit despot Vladimir Putin. Parliaments around the world will undoubtedly be holding similar debates. It is important that the voices of the people of Scotland are heard loud and clear. We support Ukraine, and we support its independence, its sovereignty and its continuing peaceful journey in democracy.

No country—no despot—has the right to thwart the will of the Ukrainian people, which was expressed overwhelmingly in 1991, when 92 per cent of its population supported and endorsed its independence. However, here we are in 2022, with the country almost encircled by Russian forces, amid the pretence that it was all about military exercises and peacekeeping in the region.

The cat was finally out of the bag when Putin announced that he supported the independence of two regions, Luhansk and Donetsk. That gives him the freedom, he says, to send his forces into those regions of Ukrainian territory and, now, across the country.

Putin's claims that his actions are only about defending his territory from further encroachment by NATO countries wear a bit thin when we consider the fact that, if he occupies Ukraine, he will immediately be alongside eight NATO nations—Estonia, Latvia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey—with the incredible danger that that poses for the world. Clearly, his motive is to grab Ukraine and start expanding his Russian empire once again. The warning signs have been there since Crimea was grabbed in 2014.

The threatening language that has been used by Putin in recent days has shocked people across the world. I wonder whether members watched his staged press conference with his advisers, all of whom looked extremely uncomfortable—with one being humiliated and bullied into saying what Mr Putin wanted him to say. I found it shocking that a world leader could behave like that with his own trusted advisers and could act with such violence against his neighbours. I can only hope that the ordinary Russian people can see through that and challenge that man's authority. Colleagues should remember that the power of the people is always greater than the people who are in power.

What can be done? Sanctions have already begun, but will they be enough? They did not reverse his actions in Crimea, and he got away with that. Surely new sanctions have to be swift and far reaching and to extend beyond targeting a few mega-rich Russians and a handful of banks. Putin is not stupid. He will have anticipated that and put in countermeasures to make sure that he can bankroll whatever action he wants to take.

What else, therefore, can be done? I am no international relations expert but, already, I am getting messages from my constituents demanding wider action. Surely there is a case for expelling Russia immediately from participation in all sporting events: the world cup, football competitions, the Olympics—the lot.

Should Russian airlines and private jets be banned from landing anywhere in the world? Last year, there were 10 million tourist visits out of Russia, and another 10 million business trips out of the country—of people who were no doubt enjoying their wealthy excesses and were in pursuit of shady deals across the world.

Governments everywhere must also get a grip of the situation in which Russian billionaires are eager to use their wealth to buy influence, position and assets, particularly in London. There is no point in some of our colleagues denying that their organisations have been beneficiaries of that in a big way. People who sup with the devil should make sure that they have a long spoon.

Finally, to the people of Ukraine, I say: Scotland stands with you, and we will do all that we can to protect your country, your people and your freedom. Myru ta svobody Ukrayini! Peace and freedom to Ukraine!

16:18

**Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab):** It is a great pleasure to follow Willie Coffey in the debate.

There are days on which we wake up to events that will stick with us for the rest of our lives. Given the events of this morning, I fear that today will stay with those of us here in the chamber, everyone around Scotland and everybody around the world.

I welcomed the Prime Minister's statement this morning that the UK

"cannot and will not just look away"

at Russia's

"hideous and barbaric"

attack on Ukraine. That will be remembered, because Ukraine is not just a little breakaway republic, and Putin is not a peacekeeper; it was an invasion of a sovereign state. Since the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, and through the Russian Government's on-going support for separatists in the Donbas, Russia has attempted to undermine the Ukrainian Government and to disrupt its path to democracy. Ukrainians want a democratic future, and they should be able to determine their own political destiny.

Last year, at the Crimea Platform summit in Kyiv, the secretary general of the Council of Europe, Marija Burić, said:

"We remain steadfast in our support for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders and we support the full implementation of the Minsk agreements and the Paris summit conclusions that are crucial to ending the military conflict in Donbas".

Yet today, we find ourselves where we are. We will stand firm behind the people of Ukraine, supporting their sovereignty and condemning Russian aggression. During this dark moment in history, we must all stand strongly against Russian aggression, in solidarity with Ukraine.

Vladimir Putin's attack on Ukraine was unprovoked. It was an unjustifiable outrage and a heinous violation of international law that will, sadly, have tragic consequences. The Scottish Labour Party stands with our allies and partners in condemning it in the strongest possible terms, and we will maintain and strengthen our unity and our resolve on the matter. That includes a commitment to NATO that is unshakable. It is Russia's actions

that are driving this dangerous escalation of tensions. We believe in the importance of upholding and defending democracy and freedom of choice.

I would like to spend a moment concentrating on the refugees and displaced people who I fear will be a consequence of not just the past 24 hours but the build-up over the past years. There are already estimates that 2.9 million people will be in need, and that number will likely rise fast as more areas are targeted. There is a risk of large-scale displacement of people and flows of refugees out of the country, fleeing the conflict.

We need the Conservative Government at Westminster to urgently provide details on the scale of aid that it will provide to support the Ukrainian people at their time of need. I welcomed the comments this morning, at First Minister's question time, about the commitment from here in Scotland to support those who come to us.

Russia must grant full and unfettered humanitarian access to the International Committee of the Red Cross, as it is required to under the Geneva conventions, and abide by the laws of armed conflict.

I was contacted by Stefan Kazmyrczuk, as I know that a number of MSPs from East Lothian and across the south of Scotland will have been. His grandfather came to Haddington during world war 2. Stefan wrote:

"Before the eyes of the world, a nuclear superpower has invaded a sovereign, independent, western-aligned nation with a show of chilling military force and a callous disregard of the democratic wishes of the citizens of Ukraine. This has been calculated and predicted by some of the most advanced technologies available to Western democracy but today,"

at this moment,

"we still stand on the cusp of a humanitarian disaster, unseen on our continent since the 1940s."

The responsibility for that lies at the feet of Putin, but how we deal with it lies at our feet.

16:23

**Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP):** The condemnation of Russia's declaration of war on Ukraine must be absolute and the reaction must be exceptional. The UK's pitiful action thus far in the sanctioning of three individuals and five banks was simply waving a green flag to Putin. He will not care about sanctions unless they are so strong as to imperil the Russian economy, including the entirety of his inner-circle oligarchs and their involvement in international corruption and money laundering. Action such as that will require us to be willing to accept some costs.

Further Russian aggression will see countless innocent people, including women and children, killed, maimed, left homeless and destitute, with their future in tatters.

As declared in my entry in the register of interests, I am a director of the REVIVE Campaign, which advocates for the victims of conflict and explosive weapons. For some time now, we have been deeply concerned about Ukraine and her people. Parts of Ukraine still remain heavily contaminated with landmines and unexploded ordnance from previous conflicts.

The fog of war will make it even more difficult for those of us working in the humanitarian space to have an accurate picture of where the victims are and the extent of harm. Of course, it is always the innocent who suffer most in conflicts.

However, UK action thus far has hardly reached the level of feeble. In January 2017, David Leask in *The Herald* reported on an accusation by Ukraine's anti-corruption bureau that a Scottish limited partnership was at the heart of a major arms scandal. That was part of Ukraine's crackdown on corruption. Calls from the then SNP MP, Roger Mullin, for the security minister, Ben Wallace, to launch a detailed investigation fell on deaf ears. The UK Government still has no equivalent of Ukraine's anti-corruption bureau and has never launched a major crackdown on corruption and money laundering.

In earlier debates, I have stated that £190 billion of financial crime plus £100 billion of money laundering occurs every year in the UK. Presiding Officer, I was wrong to quote the figure of £290 billion—I have underestimated the amount of money laundering. The UK's National Crime Agency has stated that, because of the presence of the City of London's financial sector,

"there is a realistic possibility"

that it is

"annually in the hundreds of billions of pounds".

Money laundering on a gigantic scale, a significant proportion of which will involve Russian institutions and oligarchs, has been met with indifference for years. An economic crime bill has been talked about and then dropped—I will watch to see whether it will now proceed.

Mention has been made of the case of the Russian laundromat scandal, in which 113 Scottish limited partnerships were at the heart of over \$20 billion that was being laundered from Russian banks. That is a direct stain on our international brand. One of those involved was Igor Putin, Vladimir Putin's cousin.

The UK Government should have closed down massive corruption and money laundering long

before now. The oligarchs and corrupt institutions have been given a free pass. Real and substantive action must now be taken. We will not be standing with the Ukrainian people if we do not act decisively now.

16:27

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** I am something of an insomniac and, as is typical, I woke up at 3 am this morning and turned my small bedside television on to News 24, so I saw minute by minute the developments at the emergency meeting of the UN Security Council and I saw the invasion of and declaration of war on Ukraine by Putin.

I listened to the submissions by the Ukrainian representative—some were painful—as he heard about the attacks on his homeland. Something he said really caught my attention. He challenged the Russian representative to produce minutes of a meeting in 1991. I had no idea what he was talking about, but I looked into it.

As we know, Russia is a permanent member of the UN Security Council—one of five, along with China, France, the UK and the US. The council is, ironically, a legacy of what happened post world war two. Any member can veto any substantive resolution, so we are stuck. Russia, along with the four other members, is charged with maintenance of international peace and security—not with disrupting it. Obviously, Russia cannot remain a member. My understanding is that it takes a two-thirds majority of the General Assembly to suspend or expel a country from the UN—but that is unlikely.

However, there is another avenue to explore. Russia was not always a permanent member of the Security Council—the Soviet Union was. Was it legal, therefore, for Russia simply to step into the shoes of the Soviet Union in 1991? It is an entirely different country, with different territorial boundaries—although Putin, in his political madness, obviously has plans for other surrounding countries.

There is a precedent. In 1971, under Chiang Kai-shek's nationalist Government, the Republic of China was replaced on the UN by the People's Republic of China, which does not include Taiwan. Of course, Taiwan is still not a member of the UN. Under UN General Assembly resolution 2758, the General Assembly recognised the People's Republic of China as the rightful representative of China in the UN and gave it the seat on the Security Council.

I am not an expert on international law, but I am not aware of any such resolution to recognise

Russia as the successor to the Soviet Union, whose territory changed considerably.

That might seem to be dry legal stuff, but is that a route to expelling Russia from its permanent seat on the UN Security Council? That is a real test for the United Nations. The League of Nations failed. It is a test to see whether, with legalities, the UN can expel the disgraceful and atrocious behaviour of Putin from the UN Security Council.

16:30

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** Today, Parliament has demonstrated democracy in action. All our leaders have expressed solidarity with the people of Ukraine and have called for action to stop the military invasion. Colleagues from all across the chamber have highlighted the peril that the world now faces.

For days, I have, like others, been watching analysis and late-night "Newsnight" interviews, following the coverage of Putin's statements and of the build-up of troops on the border, and listening to the ramping up of aggression. We, our European neighbours, the US and the UN have spoken out on the need for respect for nation states, and have called for dialogue in order to de-escalate the tensions that are being promoted. We are members of NATO, and we have links across the UK, the EU and the US, which are vital. We need to warn of the cost and consequences of military intervention. Relations across democracies will never be perfect, but we are allies and we should treat one other with respect and co-operate, and we should work between our Parliaments and Governments to deliver solidarity.

As a student of 20th century history, I have—filled with dread—watched what has happened in the past few weeks. We are now in the last place that we want to be in. It is a dangerous place for the people of Ukraine and, as colleagues have suggested, for the world as a whole. We need to send a firm and unambiguous message about our commitment to the security of our allies and the sovereignty of Ukraine.

In recent weeks in our Parliament, there have been excellent debates on Holocaust memorial day and on the Nationality and Borders Bill. The lessons on the immediate and long-term costs of people suffering and having to flee from military aggression are stark.

While expressing solidarity with the people of Ukraine, we must do everything that we can to support them in their time of need. That means action. It means humanitarian support for people who might have to flee from Ukraine, with safe routes and good futures. We debated that on Tuesday, this week. As Anas Sarwar made clear,

we have a moral responsibility to deliver humanitarian support.

As many members across the chamber have said, sanctions are crucial, so that there is a cost to the Russian regime for its aggressive actions and to make it clear to Putin that there will be massive costs for his actions. However, there is much more that the UK Government can do. Our Labour colleagues in the UK Parliament have been holding the UK Government to account on the cost of the lack of action on the Russia report. As Keir Starmer has highlighted this week, oligarchs and millionaires have had free deals to come to the UK, buy property and make profits with no tax accountability or transparency. That has to end now.

As others have said—Fiona Hyslop said this powerfully—we need to crack down on money laundering and shell companies. As an article in *The Guardian* yesterday observed, we need a crackdown on donations to the Conservative Party. The debate is not about whether that happened, but about how much was donated.

We also need to work together to challenge false messaging. In recent weeks, we have debated the benefits of the BBC and the public broadcasting and news standards that we have in our regulated media. We have observed that our Governments are not always happy with the media, but we have standards of accuracy, which are vital. It is time to challenge RT, which does not apply such standards of rigour and accuracy. It is shocking to think that a former First Minister of Scotland is still spearheading that channel in the UK. We all need to reflect on that. The Russian Government has used false messaging in relation to Donbas and Luhansk in recent days, so urgent action is required now.

Crucially, we need to stand in solidarity with the Ukrainian people and to support those who need to flee to safety. We need to condemn the deliberate escalation and the misinformation in the lead up to the invasion of Ukraine, and we need to work together to tackle Russian money laundering. We need to support every effort to de-escalate the crisis that the world now faces and we need to call for an end to the military aggression and intimidation.

This afternoon, I attended a peaceful solidarity demonstration outside the Russian consulate. People in Ukraine who have relatives living in Scotland are worried about and fearful for their families and the future of their country. They say that they have been calling for years for stronger action on and sanctions against the influence of corrupt Russian money.

We must act and reflect. We must remove Russia from financial mechanisms such as the

Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication. We must come together now to do everything that we can do.

I hope that the Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture will say in his closing speech what more we can do to stand resolutely with our allies to send a clear message and to protect Scotland from cyberattacks. I hope that he will tell us what the Scottish Government is doing to reach out and support people in the event of devastating humanitarian consequences of what is happening in Ukraine.

As others have said, there is a growing crisis in Ukraine, but we also need to send a message to leaders across the world that aggression and lack of respect for sovereignty are not acceptable. We must stand up for democracy across the globe.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** I call Liz Smith to wind up for the Scottish Conservatives. We have some time in hand, so I can be generous.

16:36

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Times like this make us think carefully about what this place stands for. Members have stood together this afternoon to condemn what is happening in Ukraine at the hands of Vladimir Putin. The absence of any amendments to the motion for debate shows how strong the unity across the chamber is. We may have very strong party-political differences, but the principles of democracy matter far more. It is those principles of democracy that are currently at stake in Ukraine and across the world.

Like several other members, I woke this morning to the sound of air raid sirens and shelling on Nick Robinson's BBC broadcast from Kyiv. Those were not the air raid sirens and shells to which we have become accustomed in history documentaries: the sirens and shelling were for real. The BBC's report was chilling, as has been the case throughout today's media broadcasts.

Hearing BBC reporters describe buildings in the centre of Kyiv made me recall my only visit to the city, back in 1991. That followed several visits that I had made to Leningrad and Moscow in the late 1980s, as a young teacher interested in Gorbachev's perestroika and glasnost. Like other Soviet states that declared their independence in 1991, Ukraine was emerging from 70 years of totalitarianism, having suffered civil war in the Bolshevik revolution, famine in the 1930s, brutal Nazi occupation in the second world war and then purges and economic stagnation. Our guide told us that there was a strong reawakening of Ukrainian identity. That was evident from the talk

of democracy in cafes and bars and from the flying of the Ukrainian flag, with its sharp blue and yellow denoting the sky above the golden prairies, in places where it would previously have been banned.

The story of Ukraine since then is largely the story of its attempts to define a new future for itself in Europe and of Russia's attempts to disrupt that new direction at every turn. That obstruction has now become unprovoked military aggression and a flagrant disregard for international law. Vladimir Putin's illegal actions in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions violate the Minsk protocol and this morning's military manoeuvres elsewhere are final proof—if any were needed—that the Russian Government is intent on expanding its sphere of influence westwards, no doubt with the aid of Belarus.

The invasion has happened because the Ukrainian people have had the guts to stand up to Russian influence and to declare that they have no wish to be held hostage by Putin. Like us, they wish to guard their precious democracy.

Russia's actions are repugnant, not only because of the likely killing of thousands of innocent people or because of the humanitarian disaster that will inevitably follow, but because of the fear that Russia could use its recent so-called recognition of Donetsk and Luhansk as an excuse for the future annexation of other former Soviet states. As the First Minister said, it may also encourage other dictatorships to do the same.

Where are we right now? First, the combined intelligence of the United States, Britain and NATO in recent weeks has proven to be entirely accurate, despite some scepticism in various quarters that that was not the case. To some extent, that accuracy is reassuring, and it perhaps helps us to understand better exactly what is happening on the ground, which can better inform the strategy of what has now become a wholly unified west.

We know that the Ukrainian army, although it is not able to take on the military might of Russia, is much bigger and better prepared than it was eight years ago. We know, too, that the recent lessons of history in Afghanistan send a very strong warning signal to Putin that any invasion, which could be long and bloody, against a country of such size as Ukraine does not end well for the aggressor. This is not Georgia or Chechnya—bad as those situations were—but something much bigger.

There is something else in the equation, and that is the response of the Russian people themselves, who have little appetite for the war or for Putin's aggression. They know that the war would bring death not only to a vast number of

Ukrainian citizens but to Russian citizens, too. The image of Russian body bags at the door of the Kremlin would not sit well with Russian public opinion and might have much greater influence on Putin himself than will the economic sanctions imposed by the west. We should make no mistake about it: those sanctions have to happen as part of the punishment of Putin, but we should not be fooled into thinking that they are the only factor that will drive Putin's reactions.

The sanctions that are imposed to further curtail the activities of the Russian state and the economy have to happen in conjunction with the agreement of our G7 allies. That joint action is vital, as nothing would be better received by Putin than disunity among the west. It will inevitably mean that difficult decisions need to be taken, such as restricting the imports of Russian gas that have, for nations such as Germany in particular, been so crucial.

What is critical about the past 24 hours is the fact that Putin has actually succeeded in uniting the west at a time when there had been tensions and some division. Sanctions are now agreed—there are more coming—as is the need for them to be focused on Putin's oligarchs and his financial backers, including those who have sought to harbour their wealth in the UK.

However, it is also important that we increase support to our NATO allies. The UK Government has already doubled the size of its deployment in Estonia, where the British Army leads NATO's battle groups, including tanks and armoured vehicles. As the Prime Minister said, we have to be supportive of the Baltic states. We must honour those commitments.

The current actions by Russia are a very serious threat to world peace, and they threaten to bring about a geopolitical realignment that is unprecedented since the end of the cold war. Vladimir Putin is guilty of so many falsehoods to justify his actions—a trademark of dictatorship. There is no doubt that his actions, should they be allowed to continue, will be catastrophic for his own people, as well as for Ukrainian citizens. We cannot—indeed, we must not—stand by and watch, because if we do, we will witness the resurgence of authoritarian regimes across the world, whose attacks against democracies will only be emboldened.

16:43

**The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson):** I thank all members who have taken part in the debate and highlight the unanimity across the Scottish Parliament in support of Ukraine—its people, its democracy and its

territorial integrity. I credit with strong speeches the First Minister, the leaders of all the political parties and colleagues on all sides of the chamber: Kenneth Gibson, Sharon Dowey, Fiona Hyslop, Ross Greer, Willie Coffey, Martin Whitfield, Michelle Thomson, Christine Grahame, Sarah Boyack and Liz Smith. I note, in particular, the points that have been made about humanitarian assistance and the need for welcome and support for the refugees who will undoubtedly reach these shores and about the need for swift sanctions as well as combating dirty money and fighting the subversion of democracy.

A number of members rightly stressed the long-standing connections between Scotland and Ukraine. Thousands of Ukrainians have come to this country over previous centuries. Our capital is twinned with the capital of Ukraine, Kyiv, and today the flag of Ukraine flies above Edinburgh city chambers. At the heart of our capital, on Calton Hill, we have two Ukrainian memorials—more than any other country. One recognises the importance of St Volodymyr, the prince of Kyiv. The second acknowledges the Holodomor, which has already been referred to. It was the genocidal famine that the Soviet Union forced on Ukraine.

Like many people around the world and all of us around the chamber, I watched in horror as the news of Russia's invasion of Ukraine unfolded overnight, following several weeks of intensifying manoeuvres, disinformation and cyberattacks. I am distressed at reports of deaths and my heart goes out—as I know is the case for all MSPs—to every Ukrainian, wherever they may be.

The Scottish Government unreservedly condemns Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which is in flagrant violation of international law. We call for an immediate cessation of Russia's aggression and express grave concern at reports of civilian casualties across Ukraine. President Putin's actions are utterly indefensible. The international community must hold him to account. We offer our unqualified support for Ukrainian sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, and especially to the people of Ukraine.

**Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green):** We are two years into a pandemic, which will undoubtedly have an effect on the ability of countries around Ukraine to take people in. Moldova has thrown its doors open and is probably the country in Europe least able to afford to take people in. Will the cabinet secretary outline what humanitarian support the Scottish Government will be able to provide to Moldova and Ukraine itself?

**Angus Robertson:** I can confirm to Gillian Mackay that conversations on humanitarian assistance have already begun within the Scottish Government. In a very fast-moving situation, we

will consider the range of humanitarian resource and where it might be best applied. However, Ms Mackay makes a good point about Moldova and other countries that immediately border Ukraine, such as Slovakia and Romania. There are already tailbacks at all those countries' borders, with people seeking support. Those countries deserve our help, and we will make decisions in the coming days and weeks about how we can best provide that.

Let us be clear: Russia's invasion was wholly unprovoked and deserves the international community's full-throated condemnation. Putin's claim that the attack on a sovereign, democratic nation is about "denazification" is deeply offensive to the memory of the people who lost their lives in the battle against fascism in world war two, including tens of millions of Russians. His claim that Russia does not plan to occupy Ukraine rings as hollow as the denials in preceding weeks.

I echo the words of Josep Borrell of the European Union that these are among the darkest hours for Europe since world war two. We stand steadfast with our neighbours in the European Union in our condemnation of the barbaric attack.

**Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab):** I know that the cabinet secretary will share my horror at the situation that is unfolding for LGBT+ people in Ukraine. Indeed, in today's coverage, I read a statement from an 18-year-old student in Kharkiv who said:

"If we imagine that Russia occupies ... Ukraine ... they won't allow us to exist ... and to fight for our rights".

Does the cabinet secretary agree that we must do all that we can to support the LGBT+ community in Ukraine and that the UK Government must have a solid plan to welcome refugees who fear for their lives? *[Applause.]*

**Angus Robertson:** Yes, I agree unreservedly, as do colleagues across the chamber. Along with our partners across Europe, in the United Kingdom and globally, we need to stand up for the rule of law, democratic rights and human dignity, including for the likes of the LGBTQ+ community. Those are values that, as Putin's actions show, cannot be taken for granted and must be defended.

Every nation's security is threatened by Russia's aggression. Progressive, democratic values cannot be imperilled on the world stage. The international community must strengthen its resolve to co-operate and stand together against Putin's aggression.

Now is the time for the UK and the wider international community to bring the full weight of sanctions to all involved. Russia's action follows a clear pattern of behaviour in recent years, and it is

time for the international community to say “enough”.

The invasion of Ukraine is the latest and most severe example of Russia undermining sovereign states, but we should not forget Putin’s hostile actions against Moldova and Georgia or, earlier, the annexation of Crimea.

Russia has, beyond doubt, carried out state-sponsored assassinations of dissidents abroad, it is a sponsor of cyberattacks globally and, through the engagement of Russian mercenaries, it is a destabilising factor in conflict zones throughout Africa.

**Christine Grahame:** Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

**Angus Robertson:** I will give way for the last time.

**Christine Grahame:** Does the cabinet secretary agree that Russia must be expelled as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council? We must find a way for that to happen.

**Angus Robertson:** I agree that all diplomatic consideration should be given to ways in which the Russian regime can be combated in multilateral and bilateral terms. It is not for me to stand here and answer that question in the affirmative, but I think that all efforts and considerations should be made to force Russia to change its course of action.

The international community must now show that the behaviour of the Russian Federation cannot be tolerated. As the First Minister has done, I stress that the quarrel is with Putin and his cronies, not with the people of Russia, nor the Russian community who live and work in Scotland and are a valued part of our national community.

I will turn to the Ukrainian community in Scotland. In recent days, the First Minister and I have met the acting Ukrainian consul general, Yevhen Mankovskyi, and Linda Allison, the chair of the association of Ukrainians who live here, to pass on the Scottish Government’s deepest condolences on the invasion by Russia and to offer any assistance that we can.

I reiterate our strong offer of support for the Ukrainian community, including those who live in Scotland. I appreciate that this will be a severely worrying time for those with any links to Ukraine or with family and friends who live there. As the First Minister said, we have strong historical ties to Ukraine, and those who chose to make Scotland their home are valued and welcome members of our community.

I also raise the issue of those who are still in Ukraine. Scottish Government officials are in contact with the Foreign, Commonwealth and

Development Office’s consular teams so that we can support inquiries from residents of Scotland who are concerned about family and friends in Ukraine. I would urge those who have remained in Ukraine to follow the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office’s travel advice to leave as soon as it is safe to do so.

Like Scotland, Ukraine is part of the family of European nations. We will not turn our backs on Ukraine but will do our utmost to support the country during this dark and harrowing time.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes the debate on solidarity with Ukraine.



## Parliamentary Bureau Motion

16:53

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S6M-03341, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument. I ask George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move the motion.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Requirements) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 4) Regulations 2022 [draft] be approved.—[*George Adam*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Murdo Fraser.

16:53

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Presiding Officer, I wish to oppose motion S6M-03341, which relates to a statutory instrument that extends the Scottish Government's extraordinary emergency powers in response to the Covid pandemic for a further six months, from 1 March until the end of September this year. That will mean that, in total, the Scottish ministers will have held those powers for two-and-a-half years. That includes the powers to require vaccination passports for entry to certain premises and to make face masks mandatory. The instrument is only a precursor to the Scottish National Party's intention to make the emergency powers permanent. That cannot be acceptable.

Across all parts of the United Kingdom, we have seen a relaxation of the legal restrictions that were previously imposed to tackle Covid. We saw that first in Wales, then last week in Northern Ireland and, on Monday, the Prime Minister announced a scrapping of the rules in England. In all those jurisdictions, rules are being ditched. We are at the point at which

"we move away ... from legal restrictions and rely instead on sensible behaviours, adaptations and mitigations."—[*Official Report*, 22 February; c 20.]

Those are not my words, but those of the First Minister in this very chamber on Tuesday afternoon.

Why, if that is the position of the Scottish Government, do we need to have these emergency powers in the hands of ministers for a further six months? Surely, it is time to start trusting the people to exercise personal responsibility.

Already the Scottish people have demonstrated that they can be trusted to act responsibly. Some members of this Parliament were left looking

rather foolish earlier this week when they commented on the Prime Minister ditching the rules that required self-isolation following a positive test in England, as they were seemingly unaware that there has never been a law in Scotland that required people to self-isolate in those circumstances. The only laws on self-isolation here related to the limited circumstances of international travellers. Instead, we have public health guidance, which has been strongly adhered to by the Scottish public.

Therefore, the Scottish people have already demonstrated their willingness to comply with guidance. We also saw that in December when, within hours of advice being issued by Public Health Scotland about Christmas parties, the hospitality trade was being deluged with cancellations. It was not the law that forced people to take that action, but their adherence to public health guidance.

We should, in this Parliament, be trusting the people to exercise their good sense and judgment, which the Scottish people have demonstrated in spades that they are capable of doing. There is no need to extend the emergency powers for one day longer and the Parliament should reject the instrument that is before us.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call the Deputy First Minister, John Swinney, to respond on behalf of the Scottish Government.

16:56

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):** The amendment regulations extend the date on which the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Requirements) (Scotland) Regulations 2021 expire, from 28 February 2022 to 24 September 2022. If that expiry date is not changed, the baseline measures will automatically cease on Monday 28 February.

We have started taking steps to remove the baseline measures. The First Minister announced to the Parliament on Tuesday that the Covid certification scheme will come to an end on Monday, and this morning I signed regulations that will make that happen. Murdo Fraser was, quite simply, plain wrong on what he said to the Parliament on that point.

We expect that the other legal requirements will be converted to guidance on 21 March, although, as the First Minister said on Tuesday, that is subject to there being

"no significant adverse developments in the course of the virus".—[*Official Report*, 22 February 2022; c 18.]

**Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** Will the Deputy First Minister give way?

**John Swinney:** Of course.

**Alex Rowley:** The COVID-19 Recovery Committee discussed the matter this morning. It is good that we are starting to see the baseline measures removed, but we are not yet out of the pandemic and we should not give the impression that suddenly everything is back to normal. That is why Labour was willing this morning, and will be willing tonight, to support the continuation of these temporary measures for the next six months.

I want to be clear that we oppose any move to make any of the measures permanent, and we will oppose a permanent extension of any powers. However, I believe that right now it is sensible to allow the Government to have that flexibility, because we are not out of the pandemic. The Government needs to make that point again and again.

**John Swinney:** I am grateful for the considered point that Mr Rowley has made. This matter comes down to a fundamental point of legislation: whether there should be, in statute, provision that enables the Government to take swift measures to control a pandemic—not that it must or that it will take those measures, but that it might have to use those powers.

Mr Rowley raises fair points about the long-term legislative issues, which the Parliament will consider and scrutinise. However, at this moment we still face challenges in relation to Covid. The extension of regulations that I am putting to the Parliament today, which is essentially about ensuring that the face coverings restrictions can remain in place, if that is necessary, until September—although we hope that it will be only until 21 March—will ensure that the Government has the ability to do exactly that.

I welcome Mr Rowley's contribution and, as I confirmed to Mr Whitfield in discussions—yesterday, I think—we will of course have full parliamentary scrutiny on all those points.

We do not know for sure that it will be appropriate to lift the measures that are included in the regulations from 21 March. We hope that that will be the case, but we want to make sure that we have the arrangements in place to enable us to do that. For now, it is really important that we do not allow the remaining baseline measures to expire by default on 28 February. The regulations will ensure that that does not happen and that the measures can be removed when the time is right.

Subject to the course of the virus over the next few weeks, we expect to be in a position to remove the measures on 21 March, but approval of the regulations will provide the statutory basis for the Government to be able to act, should there be any deterioration in the coronavirus situation. Members will be familiar with the very sharp turns

of events that have taken place over the course of the pandemic, when we have gone from a position that we thought was stable and benign to an acutely difficult position in a very short space of time. I simply counsel members to consider that point as I invite them to endorse the regulations that are before the Parliament.

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** The question on the motion will be put at decision time.

## Decision Time

17:01

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

There are two questions to be put as a result of today's business.

The first question is, that motion S6M-03333, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on solidarity with Ukraine, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament offers its unqualified support for Ukrainian sovereignty, democracy, independence and territorial integrity; condemns unreservedly Russia's violation of Ukraine's sovereignty by recognising the so-called Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic, and expresses its concern at the disturbing reports of Russian forces beginning a further invasion of Ukraine's territory, in flagrant violation of international law; acknowledges the response to date of the international community in applying sanctions against the Russian regime and calls on it to redouble such efforts to discourage Russia from further aggression; further acknowledges the limited sanctions announced by the UK Prime Minister and urges that these should go further as soon as possible, with severe sanctions imposed upon Putin's regime, his oligarch backers and their assets globally; supports efforts to deter Russia from further aggression and efforts to require Russia to reverse its illegal and provocative actions; records its concern about the grave threat to the safety and security of Ukrainian citizens; stands in solidarity with the people, Government and Parliament of Ukraine, and Scotland's Ukrainian community, and stands ready to support them in any way Scotland can.

**The Presiding Officer:** The final question is, that motion S6M-03341, in the name of George Adam, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No

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

17:01

*Meeting suspended.*

17:07

*On resuming—*

**The Presiding Officer:** We come to the division on motion S6M-03341, in the name of George Adam. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is now closed.

**For**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (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)  
 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)  
 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)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

### **Against**

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (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)  
 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)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 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)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on motion S6M-03341, in the name of George Adam, on approval of an SSI, is: For 84, Against 31, Abstentions 0.

### *Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Requirements) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 4) Regulations 2022 [draft] be approved.

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

*Meeting closed at 17:09.*

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

---

Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

---

All documents are available on the Scottish Parliament website at:

[www.parliament.scot](http://www.parliament.scot)

Information on non-endorsed print suppliers is available here:

[www.parliament.scot/documents](http://www.parliament.scot/documents)

For information on the Scottish Parliament contact Public Information on:

Telephone: 0131 348 5000

Textphone: 0800 092 7100

Email: [sp.info@parliament.scot](mailto:sp.info@parliament.scot)

---



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba