



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Meeting of the Parliament (Hybrid)

Tuesday 29 March 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 or by contacting Public Information on 0131 348 5000

Tuesday 29 March 2022

CONTENTS

	Col.
TIME FOR REFLECTION	1
TOPICAL QUESTION TIME	3
Ferry Procurement (Vessels 801 and 802)	3
Accident and Emergency (Waiting Times)	7
PERINATAL MENTAL HEALTH	12
Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)	12
The Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care (Kevin Stewart)	15
Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con)	18
Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab)	20
Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD)	22
Natalie Don (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)	24
Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con)	26
Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)	28
Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab)	30
Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)	31
Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green)	33
Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP)	35
Carol Mochan	36
Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con)	38
The Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport (Maree Todd)	40
Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab)	43
SCOTTISH LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS (CANDIDACY RIGHTS OF FOREIGN NATIONALS) BILL: STAGE 1	47
<i>Motion moved—[George Adam].</i>	
The Minister for Parliamentary Business (George Adam)	47
Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab)	48
Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con)	51
Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab)	53
Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)	55
Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green)	56
Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)	58
Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP)	60
Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab)	61
Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con)	62
George Adam	64
BUSINESS MOTION	68
<i>Motion moved—[George Adam]—and agreed to.</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Stephen Kerr]—and disagreed to.</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Neil Bibby]—and disagreed to.</i>	
Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con)	68
Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab)	69
The Minister for Parliamentary Business (George Adam)	70
DECISION TIME	79
COMMONWEALTH DAY 2022	80
<i>Motion debated—[Sarah Boyack].</i>	
Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab)	80
Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)	83
Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con)	85
Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)	87
Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)	89
Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab)	90
Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con)	91
The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson)	93

Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 29 March 2022

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

Time for Reflection

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

The first item of business this afternoon is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is the Rev Sheila Moir, who is minister at Dryburgh District Churches, Scottish Borders.

The Rev Sheila Moir (Dryburgh District Churches): Presiding Officer and members of the Scottish Parliament, thank you for the opportunity and privilege to share time of reflection with you this afternoon.

There is a hymn called “The Servant Song”, which I count as one of my favourites in the Church of Scotland’s hymn book. The second verse is especially relevant to where I live and serve my parishes in the Borders, in that it talks about being pilgrims on a journey. Let me read it to you:

“We are pilgrims on a journey,
and companions on the road;
we are here to help each other
walk the mile and share the load.”

Living beside St Cuthbert’s way means that we see pilgrims almost daily as they walk the familiar paths that have been walked for hundreds of years. On 20 March each year, St Cuthbert is celebrated as a Celtic saint. Cuthbert, who initially spent time tending sheep on the hills in the Borders, is said to have seen a vision of angels in the night sky and a light descending from heaven, and he is well known for prophecy and visions. He then went to Old Melrose, where he was guided and mentored by St Boisil, the prior at Old Melrose, who is less well known. The pair became good friends. Cuthbert went to Lindisfarne to continue his ministry of preaching and to spend time in reflection.

This is also the season of Lent in our Christian churches—a time of preparation and reflection as we journey towards the cross and Easter, celebrating our risen Lord. I am aware, too, as we all are, that it is a difficult time for the people of Ukraine and the countries around Ukraine, which are taking in the many refugees and tending to their needs.

“The Servant Song” hymn offers some hope. It is a prayer for all who are finding life difficult at this time, along with the journeys that they make daily.

“I will hold the Christ-light for you
in the night-time of your fear;
I will hold my hand out to you,
speak the peace you long to hear.
I will weep when you are weeping;
when you laugh I’ll laugh with you;
I will share your joy and sorrow
till we’ve seen this journey through.”

The words resonate for me as I watch and reflect on what is happening in Ukraine. We live in a world that is very much in need of peace, hope and love. May we all seek to do whatever we can at this time for all who are in need, as well as show kindness to one another.

Thank you for listening.

Topical Question Time

14:04

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is topical question time. In order to get in as many members as possible, it would be helpful to have short and succinct questions and answers.

Ferry Procurement (Vessels 801 and 802)

1. **Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reports that decisions about the procurement of vessels 801 and 802 were rushed “for political purposes”. (S6T-00630)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy (Kate Forbes): It is entirely wrong to suggest that the contract award was rushed for political reasons. First, the timetable does not support that notion, given that Ferguson Marine Engineering Ltd was publicly announced as the preferred bidder in August 2015. Secondly, the contract was awarded in line with all the procurement rules and practices in the normal way, as the Audit Scotland report confirms. Thirdly, contrary to what Jim McColl said this morning on the BBC, it was the chief executive of Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd and Jim McColl himself who signed the contract. That is a man with a clear interest in shifting the blame on to others when, ultimately, the root cause to the delays of these important vessels was their construction under FMEL.

Neil Bibby: Yesterday, the First Minister said that she has

“no hesitation in answering any and all questions.”

I believe that the Parliament must hear from the First Minister in detail this week. However, in the First Minister’s absence, is Kate Forbes able to confirm whether the award of the contract without a full refund guarantee was discussed and agreed by the Cabinet? If so, was the Cabinet made aware of CMAL’s concerns? If not, is the Scottish Government’s position that the decision to ignore CMAL was made by Derek Mackay and him alone?

Kate Forbes: There has been a debate on this subject, there has been a statement on this subject, I am answering questions on this subject and I have answered press queries on this subject, so I think that the member will find that there has been significant scrutiny of it.

As I said in my first answer, the procurement process was undertaken in good faith following appropriate due diligence. No concerns were raised at the point of announcing the preferred

bidder in August 2015, and that is why the preferred bidder was announced based on the advice of CMAL. FMEL clearly scored the highest score overall. When concerns were raised, mitigations were put in place. That is all very well documented in the Audit Scotland report.

Neil Bibby: That did not answer the question that I asked. [*Interruption.*] It failed to answer it. I think it evident that only the First Minister can clear up the questions about what has gone wrong and who was involved when.

We need honesty and openness on the issue. We cannot afford secrecy and cover-up, because taxpayers, in the middle of a cost of living crisis, are paying for the cost of this Government’s failure. Audit Scotland has pointed to a lack of information about the decision-making process. This is very serious indeed.

For the Public Audit Committee to do the job that it must now do, every piece of relevant information needs to be published, including communications between ministers, special advisers, accountable officers and Government agencies about the award of the contract. Can Kate Forbes at least confirm today that that will happen?

Kate Forbes has said today that there was no rush and no politics. I do not think that anyone thinks that that is credible.

Kate Forbes: I can go further than that. That has already happened: reams of paperwork have been published and are publicly available on the Scottish Government website.

The fact is that the evidence about the lack of a full refund guarantee has been in the public domain since 2019, but it has taken Neil Bibby three years to come across that fact. If the member is serious about learning lessons and serious about analysis and fact, I suggest that he goes back to the parliamentary inquiry, as well as the Audit Scotland report, to look at the facts.

The First Minister stood here last week taking full responsibility for the decisions. We abide by collective responsibility. We have been open and honest. We recognise where things have gone wrong and we are learning lessons for the future. If the member would like to look at the facts, those are all publicly available.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: A number of members are seeking to ask a supplementary question. I will try to take as many as possible. If I am to do so, I suggest that it would be courteous if questions were asked and then the answers listened to. Thank you.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): As the Audit Scotland report highlights, the yard was being placed into liquidation and the only

option was for the Scottish Government to step in to save it. No Opposition MSP has yet indicated whether they would have stepped in, or whether they would have let the yard go into liquidation, leading to job losses, the shutting of the yard and the vessels being finished elsewhere.

However, we all agree on the importance of the vessels and agree that they must be in service as soon as possible, so it is vital that Parliament remains abreast of progress at the yard. Can the cabinet secretary provide any further detail regarding how Parliament will continue to be updated?

Kate Forbes: Parliament will continue to be updated. The chief executive of Ferguson Marine provides the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee with a quarterly update and writes to inform the committee if additional issues arise. The system works well, as proved by the most recent updates on the legacy cable issues. I am also in discussion with the chair and chief executive almost fortnightly about what further performance information should be made public more regularly. Ultimately, I agree with Stuart McMillan that we need to make progress on the vessels. We need to learn the lessons, but the bottom line is that, if we were to pull the plug, that would throw the vessels into jeopardy, as well as the yard.

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): Jim McColl will be surprised to hear that he is being accused of shifting the blame. We need some straight answers to straight questions. Was it Keith Brown who approved the contract for the ferries? Why was CMAL's advice not to go ahead ignored? Given that Jim McColl has said today that he would not have proceeded had he known of those concerns, should the Government not have told him?

Kate Forbes: Contrary to public statements that were made this morning, FMEL was crystal clear about the concerns that were raised about its inability to provide the required full refund guarantee. I go back to the point that we like facts in this debate. If you read the Audit Scotland report, you will see that it refers to the fact that, when the announcement was made about the preferred bidder in August 2015, no concerns were raised.

A number of weeks later, concerns were flagged about the required refund guarantee. At that point, FMEL would have been fully involved in the discussions about the mitigations that were required because a full refund guarantee was not in place. Audit Scotland covered in detail the mitigations that were pursued as a result, including around the schedule of payments.

At the point of the announcement in August 2015, no concerns were raised and that was signed off. Ultimately, CMAL and Mr McColl signed the contract.

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): Is there a ministerial direction on the agreement of that ferry contract?

Kate Forbes: CMAL and Mr McColl, on behalf of FMEL, signed the contract.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Willie Rennie is joining us remotely.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): The First Minister has repeatedly claimed that Audit Scotland found nothing untoward in the procurement of the contract, but that is not true, is it? Audit Scotland said that the failure in the procurement process to provide a full refund guarantee and the lack of milestones meant that the international standard was not followed. Therefore, the First Minister is just wrong. The procurement process was flawed and that led to the loss of millions of pounds and a five-year delay. Will the finance secretary put the record straight and agree to a public inquiry?

Kate Forbes: I will go further, right now, and quote the Audit Scotland report. It states that the

"high-level review into CMAL's procurement procedure ... found no material issues with the procurement".

As I have set out already in terms of the timetable, when the preferred bidder was announced in August 2015, concerns had not been flagged. A number of weeks later, when concerns were flagged about the full refund guarantee, there were discussions about the mitigations to be put in place. The procurement process was independent of ministerial intervention—that is a well-known and well-established fact when it comes to procurement processes—and, as the member said, it followed an internationally recognised standard.

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): Given that the yard is owned by the Scottish public, I ask how many non-CMAL orders for shipbuilding the yard is actively engaged on, bidding for or likely to secure. If it becomes obvious that the future of the yard and its workforce are best served by returning it to the commercial sector, as the Government wants to do with Prestwick airport, is that something that the Government would be willing to do?

Kate Forbes: Jamie Greene is right to flag that point. Right now, securing the two vessels is our concern and focus, but since the yard was nationalised it has completed three other vessels. The yard is progressing with work, which I note because the morale of workers at the yard must

be protected as far as possible, considering these public debates.

On the yard pursuing other work, it is actively engaged in a number of commercial opportunities. Those need to be progressed, and timetabling is key in that, because it will be at the point at which 801 and 802 are completed that the yard will look to pursue other work opportunities.

Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): If the contract had not been awarded, it is highly likely that the shipyard would not have survived. I agree with Roz Foyer of the Scottish Trades Union Congress that

“the Scottish Government was 100 per cent right to intervene.”

She was also clear that

“We must not let the current issues distract from the need to build capacity and future orders.”

How will the Scottish Government work with the yard to improve its competitiveness and win new contracts?

Kate Forbes: I welcome Paul McLennan’s support for the yard and I echo his sentiments. I have set out priorities for the yard’s management to finish building the two ferries that are currently under construction and to get the yard into shape to compete for new work. The best way to secure the yard’s future order book is to make it as efficient and competitive as possible and to win contracts on merit.

We engage regularly with the new chief executive and, as shareholder, continue to support the yard to achieve its goals in any way that we can. That is what Audit Scotland recommended in its report: to focus on completing the vessels and turning the yard around.

Accident and Emergency (Waiting Times)

2. Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government what urgent action it will undertake to resolve waiting time delays in accident and emergency following recent reported estimates from the Royal College of Emergency Medicine that the delays have contributed to 240 avoidable deaths this year. (S6T-00628)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Humza Yousaf): Those are sobering statistics. We have always recognised the relationship between long waits in A and E and increased risk of harm, so we remain committed to delivering improved A and E performance. However, there is simply no doubt that the pressures of the pandemic are impacting on that performance.

We have a range of actions under way to help to reduce pressure in A and E and maximise capacity, including our record £300 million of new investment to help services to deal with system pressures over winter and our £1 billion national health service recovery plan, which aims to drive the recovery of the NHS.

The key to reducing long waits is to improve flow by reducing occupancy levels. We are delivering that capacity through a range of actions, including our enhanced hospital at home service, and by avoiding admissions and shortening the length of stays in hospital. Ultimately, the single most important factor in easing A and E pressure is controlling Covid transmission.

We will continue to work collaboratively with the RCEM to understand how we can improve long delays and patient care.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: The cabinet secretary’s reply is just not good enough. We learned today that waiting times are the very worst on record. Official statistics for the week ending 20 March show that 2,615 patients waited more than eight hours to be seen, and more than 1,000 patients waited more than 12 hours.

Under this Government, this crisis has rumbled on for years—it is not just about Covid—with no respite for staff and no redress for patients. Ministers continue to plumb new depths in their mishandling of the crisis. It is clear for all to see that they have lost control of the situation. My party has long called for an inquiry into avoidable deaths caused by waits in emergency care. Does the cabinet secretary agree that we now need such an inquiry urgently?

Humza Yousaf: Alex Cole-Hamilton made a passing—almost fleeting—reference to the pandemic, but nobody could suggest that it is anything other than the pressures of the pandemic that are causing the significant drop in A and E performance that we have seen. Figures are just not comparable with those that we had before the pandemic.

In the current figures, we see the highest levels of infection, record numbers of patients in our hospitals with Covid and, on top of that, huge numbers of staff absences because of staff testing positive for Covid—in fact, staff absence numbers have doubled over the past four weeks. Those cumulative pressures are undoubtedly causing the dip in A and E performance.

We will take action where we can. Today, the Scottish Ambulance Service announced the record recruitment of 540 new recruits in a single year, which is positive. We will continue to invest.

On Alex Cole-Hamilton’s question, he knows that there is a public inquiry on Covid, and it will be

up to the chair of that inquiry to look at whatever issues she sees fit.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: That is quite astonishing. One of the first questions that I asked in the chamber of the cabinet secretary's predecessor was about ambulance waiting times. For the cabinet secretary to dismiss what is happening as an aberration caused by Covid does a disservice to staff and patients.

There have been 15 years of Scottish National Party mismanagement of our healthcare system, but we have now reached a new low. So many staff are at breaking point, suffering from severe burnout and even trauma in some cases. Just a few months ago, a freedom of information request that was submitted by the Scottish Liberal Democrats revealed that staff absences in the Scottish Ambulance Service alone have shot up by 300 per cent. Due to workforce planning issues and a lack of vision and relief from the SNP, some members of staff are even considering leaving the workforce altogether.

The SNP-Green Government voted down my party's staff—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Could we have a question, please, Mr Cole-Hamilton? Time is moving on.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I am coming to the question.

The Government voted down our party's call for a staff burnout prevention strategy, and it dismissed calls for—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Cole-Hamilton, I really want a question now. Time is moving on, and that is to the detriment of other members who want a shot.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: All the while, the crisis worsens. What is the cabinet secretary waiting for?

Humza Yousaf: Nobody is waiting. That is why we have invested £300 million in our national health service to cope with winter pressures; invested in the recruitment of 1,000 healthcare support workers; and invested additional moneys in the Scottish Ambulance Service, which has recruited record numbers over the past financial year. Nobody is waiting around.

I have promised that, when members of Opposition parties have good ideas, I will engage with them. Instead of having a burnout prevention strategy—a bit of paper that will lie on a shelf—we are investing £12 million in staff wellbeing, so we are taking action.

In relation to the SNP having been in government for 15 years, I remind Alex Cole-Hamilton that, for the fourth time, the people of

Scotland have voted for my party to ensure that we have stewardship over the NHS while he languishes in opposition.

Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): Behind the truly shocking statistics are real people, including those who are waiting at the Royal Alexandra hospital in Paisley, in my region, which the cabinet secretary visited a few weeks ago. On that visit, did he listen to what staff told him about the pressures that they face? Did he bother to talk to patients in Paisley, who could have told him about waiting for hours, often in pain, in the back of an ambulance? Did he listen to Dr John Thomson, the vice-president of the Royal College of Emergency Medicine in Scotland, who said:

"The rhetoric of, it's bad but we're not as bad as elsewhere, is no longer applicable"?

When will the cabinet secretary accept that people across the country are fed up of excuses? Indeed, before the pandemic, A and E targets had not been met for two years. When will he accept that people want an NHS that works, not one in which more than 1,000 patients are waiting 12 hours to be seen in A and E departments?

Humza Yousaf: On the questions that Paul O'Kane asked, I met staff at the RAH and I have, of course, spoken to patients up and down the country. My family and I use the health service, and I am grateful to every member of our NHS and of our social care system for the incredible and heroic efforts that they have made over the course of the pandemic.

Nobody—neither I nor the First Minister, when she has stood in the chamber during First Minister's question time—has denied the fact that there were issues and challenges before the pandemic. However, I hope that Paul O'Kane recognises that the pressure of the pandemic is the reason for the scale of the challenge and the reason why there is this level of pressure. People cannot think that record levels of infection, record levels of hospital occupancy with patients who have Covid, and high levels of staff absence due to Covid are not having a severe impact. The past two years have, to be frank, been the most difficult in the NHS's almost 74-year existence. We will continue to invest in the health service; our record investment of £18 billion is, of course, well known.

On Paul O'Kane's final point, I will continue to engage with the RCEM and Dr John Thomson, as I have done during my time as health secretary.

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): As we have heard, new statistics that were published this week revealed the worst A and E waiting times on record. Almost two in five people were not seen within four hours, and it is shameful that more than 1,000 people spent more than 12 hours in an A and E department. It is tragic but abundantly clear

that hundreds more people will die in A and E departments if the SNP Government does not wake up and smell the coffee.

Have the families of those who have died in preventable circumstances been informed of the reason why their loved one has died? What urgent action is the SNP Government taking to eliminate every avoidable death in our NHS?

Humza Yousaf: Whenever any patient passes away, detailed notes are passed on to the family and next of kin about why that has, sadly, happened. I know that cases have been raised in which communication could have been better on that front, and I expect health boards to ensure that there is appropriate communication in that respect.

I say to Sue Webber, once again, that I understand the important job of Opposition to scrutinise and ask questions on the issue, and I am happy to continue to answer those questions, but there are no easy solutions or answers here. The single biggest thing that we can do to help to ease some of the A and E pressures that we face is to control Covid transmission. If I had listened to the Conservatives about the lifting of regulations and protective measures, I think that the situation would be far worse than it is at the moment.

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): The unprecedented pressure will undoubtedly have added a further burden on an already tired workforce in A and E and general practice out-of-hours services. Reports of deaths due to A and E waits will have been really hard reading for staff, who have been under pressure for some time. Given that further pressure, what further measures can the Scottish Government take to support this vital workforce?

Humza Yousaf: We can ensure that our staff are well treated and well taken care of, including in terms of their mental wellbeing—I have referenced some of the investment that we have made in that regard. We can ensure that they are well paid—they are of course the best paid in the entire UK. We can ensure that we are growing the workforce, as per our national workforce strategy, which was launched recently. As we recover—we will of course recover—expanding the workforce will be vital to that recovery.

We are having, and have been having for many months now, conversations on the issue with health boards up and down the country. We know that, unfortunately, the current wave of Covid will not be the last one that we will experience. Therefore, it is vital for us to do our best to try to insulate unscheduled care and planned care from future shocks. We hope to announce changes to infection prevention and control guidance in the very near future.

Perinatal Mental Health

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a Health, Social Care and Sport Committee debate on perinatal mental health. I ask members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak button now. I call Gillian Martin to speak on behalf of the committee.

14:27

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): As convener of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee, I am pleased to open the debate and to speak about the committee's inquiry into perinatal mental health. Throughout our inquiry, and even before it started, we heard from women, partners, grandparents, friends and healthcare professionals who were seeking support for their loved ones or women in their care with perinatal mental health issues.

Before I talk about findings, I would like to thank everyone who has been in touch with the committee. I thank all the individuals, organisations and professionals who responded to our call for views. We are particularly grateful to the families who shared their individual experiences with us in informal sessions and to the organisations—Aberlour, Fife Gingerbread, Home-Start Scotland and MindMosaic—that supported them to do so. I thank those mums and dads for their openness and honesty. We do not underestimate how much it might have taken for them to do that.

Perinatal mental health problems are mental health problems that occur during pregnancy and up to one year after a child's birth. Attention to them is vital, not only because of the effect on the mother's health but because they can affect a child's emotional, mental and physical development and have a great wider family impact. Evidence has shown that perinatal mental health problems can have a far-reaching and long-lasting effect on individuals and their families. Mental health issues do not disappear a year after birth, but research shows that the specific timescales of the perinatal period represent a critical window of opportunity to address them. The period following childbirth is when women face the greatest risk of developing severe mental illness. Although perinatal mental health problems are not always avoidable or preventable, crucially, early recognition coupled with the right support and care can make a substantial difference.

We wanted our inquiry not just to shine a spotlight on people's experiences but to create a floodlight. We wanted to help to cast out the stigma that is attached to poor perinatal mental

health, which can prevent women from seeking help for fear of their children being taken away. Sadly, we heard that from quite a few women.

We want our health and social care services in Scotland to support people through their most difficult moments—to help them to cope with their circumstances by making sure that the right support structures are always in place for them.

During the inquiry, we heard sensitive and at times upsetting accounts of families in which that did not happen. We heard stories of women going through a stillbirth or miscarriage in a ward immediately next to parents giving birth to healthy babies. We still hear accounts of bereaved women who suffered baby loss and did not get the support that they needed.

We heard from a father who, following the death of his wife, experienced not only problems in accessing support services for his own mental health issues but frequent problems in accessing routine healthcare services for his baby. He told us that he felt that some services were geared up to supporting only mothers and tended to ignore fathers or not to have the right support available to them.

It is important to mention that a lot of that evidence came off the back of two years of a pandemic. We must always bear that in mind. It has been a time of unprecedented pressure for all health and social care services. During the pandemic, maternity services and infant feeding teams were prioritised and protected as essential services. Midwives, health visitors, obstetricians and the wider team continued to care for pregnant women, babies and families. However, they faced restrictions in what they could and could not do, and services were impacted, as might be expected. We heard concerning evidence that, in certain health board areas, many support mechanisms were withdrawn during the pandemic, which resulted in women facing extremely difficult situations alone.

No one should have to prepare for birth alone. When antenatal classes were withdrawn, those who could afford to pay a private provider received online support but, in some parts of Scotland, those who could not pay did not receive that support.

No one should have to attend prenatal scans or appointments alone, particularly when they might receive traumatic news, which is something that cannot be prepared for. Again, those who could afford private support could take partners to private scans, so that they could see their babies, but those who could not afford that were unable to do so.

No one should have to give birth alone, and no one should have to spend their first weeks or

months with a new baby alone and isolated. However, over the past two years, as we have seen, countless women did all, most or at least some of those things alone. Moreover, they did so at a time of great uncertainty, when everyone around them was scared, including many health professionals, because we just did not know what we were dealing with.

Those negative experiences during the pandemic will undoubtedly have knock-on, on-going effects on the mental health of the women affected. Support organisations are already seeing a sharp rise in reports of birth trauma incidents during the pandemic.

The committee is clear that high-quality perinatal mental health services, including bereavement support, should be available throughout Scotland for everyone who needs it. There are also lessons to be learned from people's experiences of maternity and perinatal care and support during the pandemic. Although, as I have said, the pandemic has had a direct impact on the provision of perinatal mental health services, some issues predate it and have been exacerbated by it. However, as a positive legacy from the pandemic, perhaps we can embrace the opportunity to resolve any longer-term issues and ensure that suitable support services are in place for future families and babies.

The committee's report highlights several areas for improvement and action. We would like there to be equitable access to mother and baby units for new mothers with complex needs, and consistent access to specialist community perinatal mental health services for all mothers who need it, regardless of where in Scotland they live.

We would like there to be a service specification for perinatal mental health services as a mechanism for delivering better and more-joined up care.

Tackling poor mental health is a major public health challenge in Scotland and beyond. It is a priority for the Scottish Government, and we would like to ensure that there is continuity of perinatal mental health support through adult mental health services when those who are affected leave the specified perinatal period.

Having a well-trained and appropriately supported workforce is equally crucial to ensuring that individuals get the support that they need. Through our inquiry, we heard of staff shortages and a lack of time for staff to help women prepare for birth or to support them afterwards. We heard that there is a need to improve and increase the training that is available for healthcare professionals, in particular midwives and health visitors, on key areas such as specific mental

health conditions that can impact on perinatal mental health; early detection of mental ill health; and support for breastfeeding, birth trauma and bereavement. That applies both to undergraduate and postgraduate educational settings and to continuous professional development in health boards.

As a committee, we welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to introduce specialist baby loss units for parents who are going through miscarriage and stillbirth, but we would like new units to be established as a matter of urgency. In the interim, we would like women to be consistently treated with respect and compassion in a trauma-informed way, in an area that is separate from maternity wards. As standard practice, every bereaved parent should be met by a specialist bereavement midwife when they arrive at hospital.

I briefly touched on some areas of economic inequality that arose because of the pandemic. However, during the inquiry, we were very aware of other barriers to care and support for some women and families, in particular those in vulnerable groups. As I highlighted, we desperately need to address the issue of stigma around perinatal mental health to ensure that new mothers have the confidence to get the help and support that they need.

I am grateful to the Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care and the Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport for their joint response to the committee's report, which we received yesterday. From the response, we note the Scottish Government's commitment to engaging with women and families to inform services and improve care and support, and we look forward to hearing further updates on the development of perinatal mental health service specification, regional provision and the options appraisal for mother and baby unit capacity.

I look forward to hearing further contributions during the debate, and I again thank the mothers and fathers who helped us in our work. We hope that, if they are watching the debate today, they feel that our recommendations reflect their experiences.

14:37

The Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care (Kevin Stewart): I am pleased to respond to the debate on behalf of the Scottish Government. I thank the convener and members of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee for raising much-needed awareness of perinatal mental health through the inquiry. I offer thanks in particular to all those who made the effort to

contribute through the consultation and the evidence sessions.

As I acknowledged when I gave evidence, the importance of perinatal mental health right now in Scotland has been demonstrated by the impressive range of responses and engagement from professionals, organisations and individuals with lived experience. The inquiry has opened the door further to conversations about mental wellbeing both during the perinatal period and more widely. In doing so, it helps us to further reduce stigma and actively promote awareness. It also helps us to ensure that our work is aligned with the core values of the women and families maternal mental health pledge.

That is especially important at present, as we acknowledge the impact that the pandemic has had on the mental health of new and expectant parents. Since 2019, the programme board has provided strategic oversight of significant investment across community perinatal mental health services, the third sector, mother and baby units, infant mental health services and maternity and neonatal psychological interventions. More than £16 million has been invested across Scotland, and as a result 10 boards now have specialist community perinatal mental health teams and eight have maternity and neonatal psychological intervention services. We continue to work with boards on developing services further on a local and regional basis to ensure that specialist support is available across all areas of Scotland by March next year.

With regard to the third sector, we have delivered more than £1.8 million of funding, which has led to the delivery of support to more than 3,000 parents, expectant parents and infants. An emerging evaluation shows that the funded work has contributed to parents feeling less isolated and better able to meet the needs of their infants and children.

The programme board will continue to ensure that lived experience is at the heart of service development, implementation and provision. We now have two dedicated participation officers who offer support around perinatal mental health, infants, fathers and equalities. That helps us to ensure that the significant upscaling of existing services and creation of new services are led by the needs of women and families.

One way in which we are listening to the voices of women and families is through our consultation on options to increase mother and baby unit capacity. The issue of how best to support access to that specialist resource is important; the committee picked up on it in its report. We are very much in listening mode on the issue and I encourage anyone who is interested to respond to

the consultation, so that a wide range of views can inform the next steps.

I know from conversations with women and families that the location of mother and baby units is of particular concern in the north of Scotland. I am therefore pleased to note that a specialist perinatal mental health community service will launch in Grampian shortly. The service will provide a specialist, multidisciplinary community service to women and families in the north-east and is part of the funding and development work that the perinatal and infant mental health programme board supports.

I recently visited the new service in Aberdeen and spoke to staff and women with lived experience. I know how much difference it will make to families in Grampian.

I want to talk about the committee's report and recommendations. As the committee is aware and as the convener said, we responded yesterday to the committee's recommendations—our response was comprehensive. The report contained a broad variety of recommendations, which we considered in depth, and I want to highlight the difference that the recommendations and the continuation of the programme board's work will make to women, infants and families in Scotland.

We are taking steps to ensure that the service landscape is more accessible to families who need support. That includes work to increase awareness of care pathways and highlight developments in specialist services, and a restatement of our commitment to the rights of women, infants and families.

We are prioritising raising awareness of perinatal and infant mental health and ensuring that families and professionals play an active role in our national work on stigma reduction.

We are supporting local areas to provide seamless transitions for families by tackling difficult issues to do with cross-sector working, so that families can more easily access the right support at the time when they need it.

Finally, we will ensure that our work continues to be informed by evidence and lived experience, by evaluating and assessing the difference that our investment is making to the lives of women, infants and families throughout Scotland.

The inquiry recommendations touch on other areas, such as maternity provision, breastfeeding and baby loss. The Government acknowledges the importance of support across pregnancy, birth and the postnatal period and is committed to supporting mental health and wider wellbeing throughout that time.

Our work around perinatal mental health is action focused and ambitious. We are committed

to ensuring that the input to the committee's inquiry, alongside the findings and recommendations that followed the inquiry, are respected and valued as they further support and inform our continuing programme of work.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Sandesh Gulhane joins us remotely.

14:44

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): I declare an interest as a practising national health service doctor.

Perinatal mental health problems can include mood disorders, depression, anxiety and even psychosis. Maternal suicide is the leading cause of maternal death between six weeks and a year after the end of pregnancy. Amazing work is done by the obstetrics teams on looking after the physical health of mums. If they are left untreated, however, perinatal mental health problems can have long-lasting effects, including on the mother's relationship with her baby and other family members, and on the child's cognitive and emotional development.

It is a huge problem; it is mainstream. Perinatal mental health problems affect about 20 per cent of women—one in five—in Scotland. The Scottish Conservatives welcome the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee's report and recommendations, but let us be frank: the report paints a worrying picture of mental health services under the SNP-Green Government. Consistency, accessibility and structure are all seriously lacking.

The report also highlights the stresses on the midwifery profession from years of inadequate workforce planning. Call the midwife? Well, if only we could. Between 2009 and 2012, the then health secretary Nicola Sturgeon slashed nursing and midwifery training places by a fifth and cut 2,000 nursing jobs. NHS Education for Scotland reports that, as of September 2020, there are more than 3,200 nursing and midwifery vacancies.

The committee heard from Dr Mary Ross-Davie from the Royal College of Midwives, who said that recruitment is particularly difficult in remote and rural areas and that just three universities in Scotland provide pre-registration midwifery education. We are all experiencing some *déjà vu*: from general practitioners to anaesthetists, and from nurses to oncologists, the SNP-Green Government's workforce planning has been abysmal.

However, it is not all about recruitment. What about retention? Dr Ross-Davie was, again, clear that decent working conditions and flexible working opportunities are not consistently available. When there are discussions about

perinatal mental health and how services could be improved, midwifery is often sidelined or is not at the centre of descriptions of possible solutions.

The committee also heard evidence that access to services is a major barrier. Waiting lists can be long and support is often available only for acute cases. The British Medical Association told members that the bar for referral is set high. Under the SNP-Green Government, women are waiting more than the maximum six weeks from referral to accessing perinatal mental health services. The committee heard extensive evidence that that commitment has not, so far, been met.

Perinatal mental health services have traditionally focused on women who are pregnant or who have a living baby. That means that mothers whose babies have died do not meet the inclusion criteria. Bereaved parents have been invited to attend clinics in which they are surrounded by families who have living babies. Surely that should not be happening.

The committee also heard that there are no services that directly address birth trauma in Scotland, despite there having been an increase in women experiencing trauma at birth—an experience that my family and I underwent at the birth of our first child. In Scotland, there are two regional six-bed mother and baby units. It is clear—evidence agrees—that mothers do better with their relationship with their baby when they are in those units. I am glad to have heard the minister say that the Government is in listening mode. We are getting the first mother and baby unit in the north of Scotland, which is welcome for mothers who will not have to travel so far.

The report makes a host of recommendations across a wide range of themes, including access, mother and baby units, workforce recruitment and retention, birth trauma, baby loss and inequalities. Not all midwifery students get perinatal mental health training. Such training should be offered to all midwifery and nursing students as a priority. There should be progress updates on implementing workforce training, along with timescales. We should be aware that perinatal issues carry stigma in relation to disclosure—speaking out about the problem—so staff who are educated in that will be able to engage fully and discern problems.

As for access to services, the Government should implement specific preventative measures, such as automatic referrals for at-risk mothers.

There should be an update on any work that the Government is planning to do or that is under way, and we should be looking to improve how perinatal mental health services are viewed: we want them to be held in the same esteem as direct physical clinical care.

We also want to ensure that every health board has a specialist baby-loss unit. Those need to be sympathetically located within maternity units. Ideally, they should have a separate points of entry and exit, because we do not want people who have suffered loss to have to walk through areas where there are lots of people with their healthy babies.

The SNP-Green Government should ensure, as a matter of urgency, that every bereaved mother and parent who accesses maternity services is met by a specialist bereavement midwife.

The Scottish Conservatives would increase mental health funding to 10 per cent of the front-line health budget. We would kick-start a permanent shift towards community mental health services by expanding programmes such as cognitive behavioural therapy, social prescribing, exercise referral schemes and peer support.

The committee's inquiry is a very important one. As we learned, it is clear that, despite the heroic efforts of our NHS staff, the SNP-Green Government urgently needs to overhaul perinatal mental health services if it is to adequately meet the needs of vulnerable women and their families.

14:51

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): I am pleased to open for Scottish Labour and to welcome the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee's report into perinatal mental health, which is an overlooked and important subject that requires much greater attention, as was acknowledged by the committee in its report.

The report exposes a great number of problems that we must address, as a Parliament and as a country. Significant concerns are contained within the report. Those concerns expose the Scottish Government's far from ideal record on supporting women who experience perinatal mental health problems. I hope and trust that some of those concerns can be addressed today.

In many parts of Scotland, there is a complete lack of accessible mother and baby units, which are vital in ensuring positive perinatal mental health. Furthermore, the report highlights that there is completely inconsistent access to specialist community perinatal mental health services across the country, which we have heard about. As is the case with so many things in our health service, it seems that there is a significant postcode lottery in access to this facet of healthcare. Generally, and despite its positive rhetoric concerning mental health, the Scottish Government is simply not doing enough to address this particular concern from mothers.

Women should not have to wait more than six weeks for initial referral to perinatal mental health services. It appears that, like for so many other targets, that was just a shot in the dark and that very little planning or funding was put in place to meet the target.

Another familiar story is the problem of recruitment and retention of staff—in this case, midwives, who are a cornerstone of our entire health service. Not only do we need more midwives; we need more who have the training that is necessary to deal with the very specific nature of perinatal mental health problems.

One account that is in the committee report, from a member of the Royal College of Midwives, was particularly concerning. I will quote this, because it is important that we hear from the staff. The respondent said:

“I cannot remember the last time we had safe staffing within our unit. On a daily basis, we are struggling to provide a decent standard of care to our women and their families.

I am an experienced midwife and am considering [leaving] the profession because I can't keep working under the high levels of stress. The continuous staff shortages [are] horrendous and make me worry that errors and mistakes could be made.”

That says everything that we need to know about the strain that so many midwives are under.

The report notes:

“The British Medical Association highlighted that the demand placed on midwives on overstretched postnatal wards resulted in pressing clinical needs taking precedence over emotional and psychological needs.”

If we cannot properly fund, train and retain more midwives with the necessary skills, that problem will continue, and hard-working staff will continue to consider leaving the profession.

In closing, I say that Scottish Labour has genuine concerns regarding the Scottish Government's ability to meet basic waiting time targets and to recruit, train and retain adequate numbers of staff. That was demonstrated by recent statistics that show that there are more than 6,600 whole-time equivalent nursing and midwifery vacancies across Scotland, 128 of which are in midwifery. For such an important role, that is very concerning. We must tackle the number of vacancies in midwifery. To address that, Scottish Labour is calling on the Scottish Government to update Parliament on its progress in implementing the 28 recommendations from the report, “Delivering Effective Services: Needs Assessment and Service Recommendations for Specialist and Universal Perinatal Mental Health Services”, which was published in 2019. We have not heard a lot since then.

My party believes that we must, in the short term, provide specific support to women who experience postnatal depression as part of a much wider increase in mental health spending. We need to improve breastfeeding support work by providing a home visit in the first week that a baby spends at home, and we need to carry out further consultation to ensure that women's needs are met. We should also launch a “babies meet babies” programme to promote socialisation and interaction by bringing together parents and carers of babies.

Those are effective and important steps that could be taken relatively soon and would immediately have an impact in improving perinatal mental health in Scotland. I hope that the Scottish Government will endeavour to consider those ideas and address them in its response and in taking forward the core actions that the report suggests.

14:56

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I commend the committee on its work on this vital issue, and I am pleased to rise for my party to speak in the debate. Scottish Liberal Democrats were proud to be the first party in the Parliament to set out a comprehensive and dedicated strategy for improving detection and treatment of maternal mental health issues. It was gratifying when the Government adopted much of that blueprint.

However, despite the good work that has been done in the area and the good progress that has been made, there sadly continues to be a postcode lottery for perinatal mental health services in Scotland. Women across Scotland cannot afford the Government resting on its laurels on the issue. Protecting mothers and giving newborn babies the best possible start in life has to be an absolute priority—not just for the Government but for every party in the Parliament.

Having a child is a life-changing event, but for many people, sadly, that change is not as straightforward as they had assumed it might be. The impact on the mental health and wellbeing of mothers can be huge. Perinatal mental illness affects thousands of women across Scotland; we have heard about some of that in the debate. It can have a crippling impact on their daily lives and can, in some cases, even threaten their lives.

The most recent report that we have was conducted by Embrace UK in 2015 and it paints a very bleak picture. It found that almost a quarter of women who died between six weeks and one year after pregnancy died from mental health-related causes. That equates to one in seven women dying by suicide, which makes it the leading cause of death among new mothers, as we heard from

Dr Gulhane. That statistic serves, as much as anything, to illustrate the need to support those women in the most effective ways possible.

The necessity for that has only increased in recent years. As a result of the isolation that mothers have had to deal with in pregnancy and immediately after childbirth during the pandemic, many more have suffered. I have raised the issue several times with the First Minister, particularly in relation to the virtual coffee mornings that I have had with isolated new mums. As a result of the cost of living crisis, which is piling on yet more strain, uncertainty is further mixed with anxiety.

It is clear that early intervention to support new mothers who are struggling is the most effective way of alleviating a potential crisis before it takes hold. That has led to some third sector organisations setting up specific perinatal mental health services. The numbers of women who are coming forward for support is increasing, and we should be glad of that. The children and families charity Aberlour Child Care Trust, for whom I worked prior to being elected, has reported that referrals to its perinatal service have continued to rise since its inception in 2016.

However, all too often in Scotland, the support that women can expect to receive depends on where in the country they happen to live. Currently, Scotland's only mother and baby units that specialise in perinatal mental health care are in the central belt, which creates a significant barrier for women who live in rural areas, and highlights the need to prioritise digital inclusion, which would allow women to access online services from home.

Third sector organisations are doing a marvellous job of plugging the gaps in provision and getting help to the people who need it, but they need to know that they will have access to adequate funding for the long term. There must be no danger of their having to cease the brilliant support that they provide because of a lack of core-cost recovery.

It is also important to note the impact of perinatal mental illness on babies themselves and, subsequently, on older children if illness is not addressed early on. Evidence has shown the devastating effect that poor maternal mental health can have on children's behaviour, development and ability to learn and grow in order to achieve their full potential. The stakes are really high.

I will finish with a quotation from a woman who, in her time of need, was able to access the perinatal mental health service that is offered by Aberlour Child Care Trust during the pandemic. She referenced the amazing relationships that she forged there. She said:

"Some people arrive and make such a beautiful impact on your life, and they don't even know. You can barely remember what it was like without them."

Let us ensure that, now and in the future, every mother in Scotland who is in need of such personal and heartfelt support can get it when and where they need it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Natalie Don joins us remotely.

15:01

Natalie Don (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP): I was very pleased to see the committee undertaking the inquiry and I am thankful to be included in the debate. This is a matter that is very important to me, as it is to many. Given my own experience, I want to focus on perinatal mental health during lockdown, which I know the committee has picked up on.

There should always be a focus on perinatal mental health services and support, but the issues have been hugely exacerbated by the pandemic. I welcome the actions that the Scottish Government is already taking through the perinatal and infant mental health delivery plan. In light of the details that the minister laid out, I know that that is a priority.

Pregnancy in itself is tough, and dealing with postnatal depression complications, a difficult birth or, at the very worst, loss is difficult during normal times, but it is even harder during a pandemic. My daughter was two months old when the first lockdown restrictions began. I count myself lucky that I experienced a few weeks of normality, but it was not long before I and many others were plunged into a world of solitary confinement with our new babies. At times, that was a blessing, and I know many new parents—myself included—who enjoyed bonding with their baby a lot of the time. However, anyone who remembers the intensity of being a new parent will, I hope, understand how hard it was at times.

Please ignore my cat, which appeared there—I am sorry about that.

People were stuck at home in the depths of exhaustion, up during the night with no chance of a breather in the morning, and with absolutely no one there to let them know that they are doing it right and being a good parent. There was no popping round to their mum's or their friend's to ask for advice. All the things that pregnant women and new parents took for granted were gone. There was less contact with health visitors and GPs. Baby classes and support groups stopped, which meant no social interaction with other mums. There was no opportunity to make connections and no interaction for the baby.

Breastfeeding support during lockdown was limited—that has been touched on. That was especially difficult. I thank the Breastfeeding Network volunteers and the community, which continued to offer much-needed support. I welcome any moves to tailor support and further support women in their breastfeeding journeys.

That all accumulated and led to feelings of loneliness and isolation, and that is enough to impact on the mental health of any pregnant woman or new mother. For mums who were experiencing postnatal depression, lockdown only served to compound and magnify it. My heart truly goes out to those who experienced loss during the period. It is vital that we continue to ensure that services are there for people who miscarry and experience loss. I am confident that we are working towards that.

I am pleased to see a focus on stigma in the committee's recommendations. There is much pressure on new mums with the idea of perfect parenting. With the world opening back up again, many women and, indeed, parents who have suffered in silence may now be hesitant to open up. We need to encourage them to do so.

I want to highlight the importance of baby classes and support networks, which continued through lockdown. Local baby groups put a great effort into keeping a little bit of normality in the lives of new parents. Logging on to Facebook Live in the morning and seeing messages from other mums and babies gave us all that little feeling of interaction. I am very thankful to the groups throughout Scotland that put so much effort into keeping that going. We need to recognise the importance of those groups, which have been on the front line as an essential service for new parents, and we need to work with them and improve access to them for all parents who, perhaps through financial difficulties, might not be able to afford to attend some of those classes.

Conversations in such settings are so important, whether they are about sleep schedules, feeding or what a little one had for breakfast. That can be all the interaction that a new mum needs to help her through her day. Such settings could be vital in reducing stigma, improving new parents' mental health and helping women to open up.

I welcome the plans for perinatal mental health and look forward to progress being made on the committee's recommendations. We should always choose to support and invest in such services. The lockdown magnified that need even more, and I have no doubt that all that I have described has made many pregnant women and new mums more withdrawn and anxious. We owe it to a whole generation of women and parents out there to make this right, ensure that support is available

and ensure that our children's early development remains a priority for the Scottish Government.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): Thank you, Ms Don. I apologise for not telling your cat that there should be no interventions or interruptions during your speech.

15:05

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): I am pleased to take part in this debate on perinatal mental health and I thank the committee for its report. I am told that having a baby can be the happiest period in someone's life, but it can also be the most difficult. As those with lived experience know, mental health issues can come from anywhere during pregnancy. The impact can be serious on expectant mothers and those who have given birth.

Mothers who are pregnant or who have recently given birth can develop feelings of sadness and depression. Mothers can feel guilty and confused. Many mothers hope to feel the glow of pregnancy; they expect to look back fondly on that period of their life. Sadly, as Natalie Don said, that could not be further from the truth for many women and for the partners and families who support them.

In Scotland, perinatal mental health problems affect up to one in five new and expectant mothers. As we have heard, that covers a range of conditions, including mood disorders, depression, anxiety and psychosis. We know that, if they are left untreated, perinatal mental health issues can have long-lasting effects on women, which can impact their relationships with their baby and other family members. The impact can extend to a child's cognitive and emotional development. In the very worst and most tragic cases, mental illness can lead to maternal suicide.

The Scottish Conservatives welcome the committee's report and urge the Government to take forward its recommendations to address what the committee rightly identifies as fundamental gaps. The report makes 55 recommendations on subjects that include access to mother and baby units and workforce recruitment and retention. It covers birth trauma, baby loss units, stigma and, of course, the impact of inequalities. It is impossible to address all the recommendations today, but the report is fundamentally about looking at how the Government can work across settings to improve patient pathways.

Many women who suffer mental health problems following childbirth are scared to come forward. They fear that they will be judged or that their baby will be taken away. Removing stigma and ensuring that services are inclusive are vital steps that can have a huge preventative impact. It is crucial to educate professionals on the right

questions to ask, so that they avoid inappropriate treatments and potential misunderstandings in the system. I therefore encourage the Scottish Government to bring forward its delayed raising awareness strategy as soon as possible.

I am concerned that the report highlights again systemic and endemic issues in recruitment and retention. When we talk of problems in our NHS, that is the dead end that—sadly—we repeatedly come to. Ministers must act now to break the roadblock and to boost training about and understanding of mental health in midwifery.

In its briefing, the Royal College of Midwives Scotland agrees with the committee that an

“appropriately trained and supported workforce”

is vital to delivering the care that women need. As the committee notes in its recommendations, it is not simply a matter of training and supporting existing staff; we also need to ensure that there are more staff—and, by that logic, fewer vacancies—in the system.

The RCM supports the recommendation that perinatal mental health training should be incorporated into training for all midwifery students. Staff also need to be empowered to engage in continuing professional development and to be able to do so with no negative impact on the delivery of patient care.

The pandemic has had a profound impact on all our lives, and it has pushed a lot of mental health services and support to an online environment. As Gillian Martin rightly identified, Covid has led to negative experiences. We know that the reduction in face-to-face contact has negatively impacted the mental health of expecting and new mothers. Not everyone is able to access online resources, and a lack of infrastructure and capacity can prevent some mothers from connecting digitally.

The committee heard evidence that some individuals have been unable to access GP appointments. That is why the Scottish Government must take urgent action to ensure that alternative routes are available for referrals into perinatal mental health services. I welcome the fact that the minister says that he is in listening mode, but on this, as on so much else, I hope that he can get into action mode quickly.

I understand that the issues are complex, but one statistic stands out: under the SNP, women are waiting more than the maximum of six weeks from referral to access services. Mothers who are seeking support can often encounter a postcode lottery, with inconsistencies in the accessibility of mother and baby units across different NHS board areas, as we heard.

Kevin Stewart: The 2019 report “Delivering Effective Services”, which Ms Mochan mentioned

in her speech, highlighted some of the issues that had to be tackled. In the three years since the report was published—two of which have been during the pandemic—we have increased the number of specialist perinatal services in Scotland from four to 10. Progress has been made during the pandemic, and we will continue to make progress as we move forward.

Craig Hoy: I welcome progress; it is the speed of the progress that I question. I accept that the minister announced today that there will be a mother and baby unit for Grampian; however, demands for that have been on the record for some time. Therefore, it is the pace of progress, rather than the desire for progress, that is being questioned.

Before I close, I will touch on the very sad and upsetting issue of baby loss. Miscarriage, stillbirth or the death of an infant scars the lives of many families. My colleague Jeremy Balfour, who is an MSP for the Lothian region, has previously spoken openly and movingly in the chamber about the issue. He talked about the importance of support, particularly from those who understand the pain that is involved. The committee’s report rightly calls out the important work that is carried out by the third sector, including by charities such as Sands—the Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Society—which provide quick, tailored access to support. I strongly urge the SNP Government to ensure that third sector organisations are afforded greater financial security as we move forward, so that they can tackle the long-term funding issues that they face.

Despite the heroic efforts of NHS staff, it is clear that the SNP must act urgently to overhaul perinatal mental health services in Scotland, particularly for those who have complex needs. The minister might be listening, but I hope that he will now act to remove the barriers that the committee has identified, which will help us to meet the needs of vulnerable women and their families.

15:13

Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): I thank Gillian Martin and others for their contributions so far, but my biggest thanks must go to the women who shared personal stories with committee members during our inquiry. They were very clear about why good access to mental healthcare matters.

As has been noted, perinatal mental health issues affect up to one in five Scottish women. Those issues range from anxiety and depression to mood disorders and psychosis. Some women are facing mental health challenges for the first time, while others have experienced them before.

The women we listened to made it clear that their families come in different shapes and sizes, which is why the committee report highlighted the need to put mums and families at the heart of care and support.

Given that our convener has already touched on the plethora of challenges and the important recommendations of the inquiry, I will use my time to reflect on the things that stood out to me personally. I will say more on the holistic, family-centred approach that I have already mentioned and touch on Covid-19, inequality and the need to listen to and respect women's voices.

The Covid-19 crisis intensified perinatal mental health issues and increased demands for services. Studies from across the world show that clearly. We know that the pandemic posed additional challenges for women, particularly those from minority ethnic and socially disadvantaged groups, and placed additional strain on services and their staff. Unsurprisingly, it exacerbated the challenges and the future development of perinatal mental health services must take account of the social detriments of maternal and infant mental ill health, reduce stigma and ensure equality of outcomes for all mums and their babies.

It is also vital that we take a more holistic approach that involves whole families and focuses on improving overall family wellbeing. That approach would also benefit our public services. The inquiry evidence repeatedly highlighted the importance and the benefits of a preventative and community-based approach that avoids mothers reaching the point of crisis.

Like any effective system that prevents mental ill health and promotes good mental health, perinatal mental health support must work at three levels: it must be universal for the whole population, selected for high-risk groups and indicated for people with signs or symptoms of mental health problems. Key to that is increasing the circulation of the information that is available to women and their families. Although there is high prevalence of perinatal mental health problems, rates of detection and appropriate interventions are still low.

I was quite shocked that postnatal depression and depression during pregnancy are thought to go undetected in as many as one in two women and that women with pre-existing mental health issues are not being identified at that first point of contact. The provision of better information can help stop women falling through the cracks.

It is also important that, when women bravely ask for help, or raise concerns about their wellbeing or that of their child—this is difficult to say—they are too often dismissed or disbelieved at that critical stage. Women must be respected

and listened to. We must get to a place in which we accept no excuses for not doing that.

Third sector services are often excellent, but women told us that support sometimes comes too late and too far down the line. Health professionals can lack awareness of those services, and an integrated approach to investing in third sector expertise is key.

On that note, I really welcome the Scottish Government's significant funding of £16 million in perinatal and infant mental health since March 2019, and the funding for all NHS boards towards specialist community perinatal mental health services. More than £4 million has been invested in that in 2021-22, which is especially welcome.

Detection and prevention are key to supporting women during that critical stage of their lives. We need to equality proof the delivery of perinatal services. Quick and easy access to perinatal mental health support must be available to every woman in need. We must stand with them and we must keep on listening.

15:17

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow Stephanie Callaghan, particularly given that she highlighted families of different shapes and sizes. To her list, I add mothers from refugee and migrant families, who have particular needs that are yet to be met in Scotland. I urge the Government to look at that issue.

I, too, welcome the recommendations contained in the committee's report. They are timely and important and we must see their roll-out accelerated.

The recruitment crisis in the NHS, which is often talked about in Parliament, often overshadows the great work done by individual NHS staff—not just medical staff but staff across the board. The work that is done in perinatal mental health by the many people surrounding the nurses and midwives is so important.

However, it is important that we address the question of recruitment. We have heard about the staff shortages and the vacancies that exist. The effect of those goes to the heart of one of the committee's recommendations on the perinatal mental health training that midwives and those who support them require. One challenge is that, although midwives can be rostered to go on that important training, vacancies and absences mean that crucial clinical care would not be given if they were to do so. What goes in those circumstances? Their lifelong training. That is unfortunate but quite right, given that they are required to stay on the

ward to ensure that the women on it are dealt with and handled safely.

One of the things that we need to look at is the support surrounding our NHS staff to ensure that such training can happen. It is all very well having the funding to provide the training and the places where such training can take place, but if staff cannot attend, we have lost an opportunity.

I thank the Royal College of Midwives for the briefing that it has provided to me and others in the chamber. On training, it says:

“We ... echo the concern acknowledged by the Committee that education and training is too often failing to take place because of staff shortages, with the immediate demands of clinical care on short-staffed units understandably prioritised.”

One midwife commented:

“Due to shortness of staff, I am unable to give good or even adequate care to pregnant ladies and mums and babies. ... Staff dread coming to work as it's an accident waiting to happen, we scrape through by the skin on our teeth.”

That is a very sad quote to share, but those are the same people who will go on to make sure that all the ladies under their care are safe and looked after. I do not in any way want to spread concern among people who have to use our midwifery services, but there is a strain and a stress within the profession and it is for the Government to look to rectify that.

In the short time that I have left, I want to ask the minister about the 2019 report that has been referenced. There were 28 recommendations in that report. Will the Government publish information on how many of those recommendations it has met and, more important, when the remaining ones are likely to be met?

With my final few seconds, I once again extend my thanks to the people who work in the midwifery service. I know from personal experience at the birth of one of my children about the stress and strain that they face. They do an admirable—no, a brilliant—job.

15:21

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): I am pleased to take part in the debate and I commend the work of the committee in considering perinatal mental health in Scotland. I thank the Royal College of Midwives and Support in Mind Scotland for their helpful briefings and I thank my former colleagues Fiona Gibb and Andrea Lawrie for their help ahead of the debate.

We have heard speeches outlining the challenges faced by women who are affected by maternal mental health difficulties and the

improvements that are required to ensure that women get the support they need to ensure strong mental wellbeing.

Covid-19 impacted us all. It was frightening, traumatic and life changing, but for women before, during and after pregnancy it has been particularly difficult. I received correspondence from constituents who were worried about the mental wellbeing of their partner, sister or daughter who had just given birth or who was struggling with the choices that they faced as they awaited the birth of their new baby.

Women were faced with a plethora of additional decisions such as weighing up the side effects of the Covid-19 vaccine against the risk of Covid-19-related illness and adverse pregnancy outcomes. Black, Asian and minority ethnic women were at disproportionate risk of adverse outcomes from the impact of Covid-19, which were compounded during pregnancy.

There were modifications to services such as home birth, no birth partner could be present and women had to attend scans or receive difficult news alone, all of which profoundly impacted maternal mental health. The removal of that choice and the prospect of giving birth alone are thought to link with anecdotal incidents of free birth, where women did not engage with health services, which significantly impacted maternal health as a whole. Women in rural areas, who were already more likely to experience mental health problems than those in urban areas, faced particular challenges in accessing services.

As we move forward from the pandemic, I welcome the opportunity for best start support to gain traction in driving forward the transformation of maternity care in Scotland. I note that the committee welcomed the Scottish perinatal mental health care pathways but highlighted concerns about access to specialist community services and the need for wider access to mother and baby units. I am pleased to see that the Scottish Government's consultation on mother and baby units is now open.

Kevin Stewart: I want to clarify something that Mr Hoy said in his speech about a new mother and baby unit in Aberdeen. What he suggested is not what I said in my speech. I said that it was a specialist perinatal mental health community service, which opens today.

I follow Ms Nicoll's view very firmly and encourage as many folk as possible to take part in our consultation on mother and baby units, which is looking at capacity in Scotland as we move forward.

Audrey Nicoll: I welcome that clarification. Like the minister, I am absolutely delighted to hear that, literally as we hold the debate, the NHS Grampian

community perinatal mental health team has gone live.

Delivery of high-quality care relies on excellent pre and post-registration education and training. I commend all our educators, particularly midwifery and mental health lecturers, across Scotland for the crucial role that they play in ensuring that midwifery students and midwives who are already in practice are provided with the highest quality education possible. I am pleased that work is under way to offer perinatal mental health training to midwives and health visitors, and I note the committee's call on the Scottish Government

"to commission further research to identify ... barriers"

to perinatal mental health staff "completing training" and to use the findings to address barriers and increase the uptake of training opportunities.

In the week following mothers' day, I commend the commitment of everyone who is working to improve maternal mental health services in Scotland and their work to support women, families, new fathers, people who experience baby loss and those who are living with problem drug use. I will certainly invite myself along to meet the new community perinatal mental health team in Grampian soon.

15:26

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): I, too, thank the people who gave evidence to the committee and everyone who is working to improve perinatal mental healthcare in Scotland.

During evidence sessions, the committee heard about the importance of proactively identifying people who are experiencing or at risk of developing perinatal mental health problems. Health professionals who are in contact with people during their pregnancy journey must receive the training that they need to proactively identify such issues. The importance of upskilling the primary care workforce, in particular, was highlighted as a critical first step in building and embedding specialist services locally, as training for health visitors, GPs, midwives and maternity staff can assist with the early identification of perinatal mental health problems.

However, training is only one part of the puzzle. Healthcare staff having the capacity to do welfare checks is a major issue. The committee was told that preventative measures should be in place during birth, but that that would require having sufficient staff on duty who were trained in how to detect early warning signs.

Although someone should go to see parents straight after the birth to check how they are doing, that does not always happen at the moment. Six-

week check-ups by GPs have not been happening during the pandemic, due to the incredible pressure that has been placed on practices. When checks happen, they tend to focus on the baby's welfare alone.

Some people report that, when they were pregnant, there was a lot of concern for their wellbeing, but that, as soon as they gave birth, the focus shifted entirely to their baby. We must ensure that parents are supported throughout the process and that help is not suddenly withdrawn after the birth. Part of that is about ensuring that staff, including GPs, midwives and health visitors, have the time and training to proactively check for mental health issues.

The committee heard about the need for training for all healthcare professionals on how to offer bereavement care after pregnancy loss and baby death. Midwives are experienced in offering bereavement care, but families might come into contact with a variety of health professionals when undergoing pregnancy loss, not all of whom will have the same level of experience and knowledge as midwives. As the committee report makes clear,

"an appropriately trained and supported workforce is crucial to ensure individuals get the support they need."

It was highlighted in evidence sessions that significant inequalities impact individuals' experience of perinatal mental healthcare. The charity Sands mentioned the need for translators who are appropriately trained in bereavement care. The committee heard about scenarios in which, in the absence of trained translators, children and family members of non-English-speaking mothers were relied on to tell the mother that her baby had died. That is clearly unacceptable.

Much work is to be done to ensure that services are inclusive and accessible to all. In its briefing for today's debate, Support in Mind Scotland pointed out that, although Scotland is considered to be one of the most LGBTI-inclusive countries in Europe, perinatal mental healthcare and services in Scotland currently exclude people with some gender identities who give birth. For example, trans men and non-binary people who are pregnant or postnatal can experience perinatal mental health issues and require tailored support for their needs but are likely to face barriers to accessing that.

As the committee's report notes, it is vital that the development of perinatal mental health services is future proofed. Good quality data will be essential in identifying inequalities. During the evidence sessions, it became clear that we do not have sufficiently disaggregated data about who is accessing our specialist services, and so do not

know how inclusive and accessible those services are. For example, ethnicity is not being adequately recorded in the antenatal period, so we are unable to identify disparities in care. That is extremely concerning, given that we know from an MBRRACE-UK report that black women are almost four times more likely to die in childbirth or during the postnatal period. Data collection must be improved if we are to address inequalities and ensure that care is truly person centred.

I conclude by again thanking those who gave evidence to the committee.

15:30

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): As a member of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee, and as a registered nurse, I welcome the opportunity to speak in this important debate. I thank everyone involved in giving evidence to our inquiry, which covered the many areas that have been spoken about today by colleagues from all parties.

My iPad seems to have frozen.

As our committee report states, women are at substantially increased risk of severe mental illness and psychiatric in-patient admission during the perinatal period. In most cases, it is mothers who are most affected, although Gillian Martin highlighted the specific example of a dad who was severely impacted by the birth of their child and the loss of the mum. Those mental health problems can affect all family members, and the effects of Covid-19 featured in much of the evidence that we took in our inquiry.

The committee's inquiry into experiences before, during and after the birth of a child highlighted a number of issues that new mothers face with the support that they receive. We heard evidence from some women affected by baby loss who reported giving birth close to women giving birth to healthy babies. I am sure that that is completely traumatising.

A constituent contacted me about that issue. They gave birth to a stillborn baby in Dumfries and could hear other babies crying in the next room. Following lots of work with NHS Dumfries and Galloway, the Dumfries and Galloway branch of the charity Sands became involved in supporting the process. The health board changed its arrangements so that any woman experiencing baby loss in Dumfries and Galloway is supported in a different space. However, that is not the case across the whole of Scotland. I note the importance of the committee's recommendation for accelerated action to establish specialist baby loss units and for new protocols to ensure that families are consistently treated with respect in a destigmatised and trauma-informed way.

Language accessibility was another issue that stood out to me during the inquiry. Gillian Mackay touched on that. Clea Harmer, the chief executive of Sands, described scenarios in which, in the absence of a professional translator who understood bereavement, children of mothers for whom English is not the first language were relied on as translators. That included one eight-year-old child who had to help her mother. That evidence particularly stood out to me.

It is, however, welcome that the Scottish Government continues to prioritise improvements to care through the implementation of the best start programme and in partnership with senior leaders and clinicians. That includes the development of specialist community perinatal mental health services, including language services, across all health boards. That will be really important as we receive refugees from Ukraine and will build on work that has been done with Syrian refugees. I ask the minister to give an update on the work to support language services.

The Scottish Government is undertaking a huge amount of work to improve perinatal mental health services. In September 2021, the Scottish Government published its maternity and neonatal (perinatal) adverse event review process. The Scottish Government has invested more than £60 million in perinatal mental health, including an investment of almost £2 million in the third sector.

We know how important the third sector is in supporting women throughout their pregnancy and post pregnancy. The funding includes money for community specialist mental health services in every health board in Scotland and for in-patient services for women with the highest level of need. In addition, there is a commitment to investment in the third sector across 33 different organisations, including Sands, which operates across Dumfries and Galloway and the Scottish Borders to provide support for women and families.

Although that work is welcome, much can be done, including at health board level. I am conscious of the time, so I will stop there. I welcome the debate and the work of all my committee colleagues.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the closing speeches.

15:35

Carol Mochan: In closing for Scottish Labour, I again welcome the report by the Scottish Parliament's Health, Social Care and Sport Committee. I thank Gillian Martin for opening the debate on behalf of the committee and for sharing the details of the process that we went through in completing this very important report.

I am glad that the report recognises that, quite simply, the Scottish Government has not done enough to support women who experience perinatal mental health problems. In fact, the Government has fallen well short of expectations, with women in some parts of Scotland being unable to access mother and baby units. As has been mentioned, that is completely unacceptable. If the Scottish Government is serious about giving perinatal mental health the focus and consideration that it deserves, it must start by ensuring that effective measures, preventive and otherwise, are in place to support women who face difficulty.

I am sure that all members welcome Kevin Stewart's listening mode, but I would very much like to see him in action mode, as that is what will be needed to meet the challenges ahead.

Kevin Stewart: We are in action mode, driven by the programme board. I highlighted some of that to Mr Hoy earlier. I ask Ms Mochan and others in the chamber to encourage folk to respond to the on-going consultation on mother and baby unit capacity. We can all do our bit to ensure that we move forward as one to get this right for women, babies and families right across Scotland.

Carol Mochan: The minister is right that we should all encourage people to participate. I assure him that I will look out for all the actions that he takes—he should not worry about that. Because of mismanagement and lack of investment in services by the Government, the issue has become a serious one on which we need action.

Emma Harper: Will the member take an intervention?

Carol Mochan: I want to make progress, please.

Scottish Labour's view is that the mental health and wellbeing of our population should be of paramount importance. If the Scottish Government shares that view, it must act and take on board all the recommendations of the committee's report to improve services, and it must do so with purpose. As Dr Gulhane said, this is a mainstream issue that must be addressed with urgency. Improving services includes investing in more mental health professionals in the community so that perinatal mental health services are accessible and close to home for those who need them. Alex Cole-Hamilton addressed that issue very well.

As I have highlighted previously in the Parliament, those in the most deprived areas are more likely to be impacted by poor mental health and wellbeing. According to the Scottish Government's "Perinatal and Infant Mental Health—Equality Impact Assessment Record",

"This is true for perinatal mental illness too, with higher levels of deprivation correlating with higher prevalence of poor perinatal mental health".

That highlights clearly that the accessibility of services close to home is pivotal for everyone, but in particular it amplifies that that should be the case in areas of most need, to ensure that no woman is disadvantaged or misses out on services due to their postcode or income.

I must reiterate the attention that the committee's report places on the importance of ensuring consistent NHS recruitment and retention of midwives, which has been mentioned many times, and on the need for them to have the necessary training to meet the needs of women who suffer from perinatal mental health problems.

The area is one in which too many midwives, nurses and other health professionals feel overworked, underpaid, undervalued and undertrained, because of the stress that is put on them in the workplace and, I believe, because of the Government's lack of action at many points. I say to the Government that, without action, the numbers leaving the profession will increase, and that we must do more. I look forward to a response from the Government on such action.

15:40

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): This short inquiry was of great personal significance to me, and it was a pleasure to take part in it. In particular, I am grateful that our inquiry accounted for the impact of baby loss, which is often a taboo subject—one that is not spoken about until it affects us personally, or those who are closest to us. When it happens, it is absolutely devastating, and the world falls apart. I speak for the friends around me who have all experienced that pain.

I thank all the women who took part in the evidence sessions, as well as the fathers; Gillian Martin specifically outlined the plight of one father who had such difficulties in accessing services for his child. The experiences that they shared with us regularly brought us to tears. I felt their pain, frustration, exasperation and sheer sense of loss as they fought to access services for themselves and for their families, partners and wee babies. I was pleased that the minister acknowledged that the inquiry raised awareness—which is much needed—of perinatal mental health.

Scottish Conservative members welcome the committee's report in full, and we urge the SNP Government to take forward its recommendations in full. The report's recommendations cross a wide range of themes, including the accessibility of services, mother and baby units, workforce recruitment and retention, birth trauma, baby loss units and inequalities.

In particular, the report paints a deeply worrying picture of Scotland's perinatal mental health services and their perilous state after 15 years of SNP control.

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): Does the member agree that it is often the third sector that provides support for people who have lost a child or who have had a child but are having some kind of mental health issues afterwards and that, unless we get proper funding for those third sector organisations, we are going to leave families behind?

Sue Webber: That is very much the evidence that we heard loud and clear. The nimbleness of the third sector provides such a lifeline to those people.

As the committee took evidence, it became clear that accessing primary care services, community services, third sector services and specialist services involves barriers for individuals who are in dire need of support. What does that mean? It means that, often, support is available only for acute cases and interventions.

The BMA told us that the bar for referral is set high. How can that be right, given that suicide is the leading cause of maternal deaths in the period of six weeks to a year after the end of pregnancy?

I welcome the minister's pledge that steps are being taken to ensure that the service landscape is more accessible, yet services are limited not just in their accessibility but in their consistency and structure. Alex Cole-Hamilton spoke of the postcode lottery of services that our families face across the country.

Let us please not sit here today and use the pandemic as a justification. Although it may have deepened the crisis, it has also acted as a monumental volcanic fissure, exposing the sheer scale of the problem: the underinvestment, the lack of planning and the lack of focus. Those issues long predated March 2020.

In particular, the report highlights the stresses that are placed on the midwifery profession by years of inadequate workforce planning under the SNP Government, under which workforce planning always appears to take a back seat.

As things stand, there is a current and long-standing shortfall of midwives in Scotland. As Carol Mochan mentioned, this is what a midwife said in response to a recent survey by the Royal College of Midwives:

"I cannot remember the last time we had safe staffing within our unit. On a daily basis, we are struggling to provide a decent standard of care to our women and their families."

Staff shortages are having an impact not just on recruitment and retention, but on training,

including training on perinatal mental health, which is too often failing to take place because of staff shortages.

As I mentioned in my introduction, I welcome the fact that baby loss fell within the scope of the committee's inquiry. We need to ensure that every health board has specialist baby loss units, which should be sympathetically located. Those units must have a means of entry and exit that is separate from maternity wards, so as not to cause additional stress, and in no circumstance should women have to walk the length of the maternity ward to access support.

I turn to the pandemic. Covid has, without question, placed severe restrictions on pregnant women. Women have been forced to attend scans without support; forced to receive sometimes devastating news; left on their own to come to terms with a loss that is beyond understanding; and left to go through labour with no support. Further, the removal of support groups and postnatal classes has undoubtedly reinforced feelings of isolation and abandonment. Natalie Don shared the very real experiences that she went through during pregnancy, and I congratulate her on her good news.

Given those sobering truths, as we learn to live with Covid, I strongly believe that the SNP Government must undertake an urgent review of perinatal mental health provision during the pandemic. If we are to learn lessons for the future, we can begin only by reflecting on the past. As Craig Hoy highlighted, the Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care said that he was "in listening mode". Is it not about time that he got into action mode? I would also like, as Emma Harper stated, to see some "accelerated action", so let us implement the committee's recommendations in full.

15:46

The Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport (Maree Todd): It is vital to promote and raise awareness of perinatal and infant mental health. Without access to the appropriate support, treatment and guidance, challenges around mental health can have a significant and long-lasting impact on young families across Scotland. I therefore thank the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee for dedicating time to investigating this important area of healthcare. I also echo the thanks that the Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care expressed to those who provided evidence to the committee, especially those who have shared deeply personal experiences.

Finally, I thank members in the chamber for their thoughtful and considered contributions. I will take

the opportunity to respond to some of those contributions, but I recognise that many issues have been raised. The Government provided an extensive written response to the committee's report yesterday and, with regard to those issues to which I am unable to respond in my closing speech, I undertake to write to members to ensure that their questions are responded to.

Martin Whitfield: The Government has confirmed that it has submitted its written conclusions to the committee, but I do not yet see that that response has been published. Does the Government know when it will be publicly available?

Maree Todd: I am afraid that that is up to the committee; I presume that it will publish the response as soon as it possibly can.

I want to bring some clarity to the issue of mother and baby units. Those units are a highly specialised service that is provided on a regional basis because of the very small numbers involved and the very specialist workforce that is required. We are currently consulting on options to increase mother and baby unit capacity, and that consultation will help to inform an options appraisal to assess the most appropriate way of increasing the number of beds in Scotland.

I make it absolutely clear: if it is needed, access to a mother and baby unit is available to women wherever they live in Scotland. That right is enshrined in the Mental Health (Scotland) Act 2015, and our mother and baby unit family fund supports family members with the costs of visits to mother and baby units.

On community perinatal mental health, we have been working in particular with the Grampian, Highland, Orkney, Shetland and Western Isles health boards to provide funding and create services that support the needs of women across those areas. Indeed, today we heard the news that the NHS Grampian community perinatal mental health team has officially launched that service today.

With regard to an update on action towards delivering effective services, we established the programme board in 2019 to implement the recommendations and to improve services. Every year, the board has produced a delivery plan that sets out detailed information about how we are going to implement the delivering effective service recommendations and go beyond that to develop comprehensive perinatal and infant mental health services across Scotland.

I agree that the third sector is a valued and vital part of the system, which is why we provide £1 million per annum to support it, across a range of organisations. That includes £578,000 for baby loss charities over the past four years, with

£178,000 going to Sands to develop the national bereavement care pathways.

On midwifery recruitment, we are working with health boards and taking forward a nationally co-ordinated UK and international recruitment campaign for midwives. We are supporting the settlement process.

On retention, NHS Education for Scotland has been commissioned to develop a national midwifery career framework.

On training, perinatal mental health is a fundamental part of the core curriculum for undergraduate midwives. I can confirm that the number of people accessing postgraduate education has remained high throughout the pandemic and that NHS Education for Scotland has been expanding training placements on commissioned programmes, as well as ensuring that perinatal and infant mental health training is provided.

Bereavement care is the responsibility of absolutely everyone who works in maternity services—all the health professionals. Midwives, consultants and all other members of that workforce are trained in bereavement care.

Jeremy Balfour: Will the minister take an intervention?

Maree Todd: Will I get the time back, Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You will, yes.

Maree Todd: I will take the intervention.

Jeremy Balfour: I am grateful.

Does the minister agree that, if a mother has to give birth to a child that is going to be born asleep, that should happen in a separate area, and that we should strive to reach that goal as soon as we can in every hospital and maternity service in Scotland?

Maree Todd: I am not sure whether the member is aware that a great deal of work on that is going on at the moment. We have put out a survey in every maternity service in the country, to establish what is provided and where the gaps might be, and we will work hard to close gaps in provision. I absolutely agree that compassionate, sensitive care is vital at that difficult time.

Gillian Mackay mentioned ethnicity data, which has been a key issue throughout the pandemic. I inform the member that Public Health Scotland has started to collect data on ethnicity in the context of pregnancy.

Presiding Officer, I have so much more that I want to say, but I guess—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give you up to seven minutes, minister.

Maree Todd: Okay. I will pack a lot more into my final minute.

Our work on perinatal mental health and wellbeing remains action focused and ambitious. The findings and recommendations of the committee's inquiry will further support and inform our continuing programme of work.

Good maternity care is crucial to good perinatal mental health. We continue to make improvements to maternity and neonatal care in Scotland through the introduction of continuity of carer in maternity services and through the new model of neonatal care, as part of the implementation of the best start programme.

Since 2017, we have provided funding of more than £16 million to support implementation of best start, which remains a firm commitment of the programme of government. We have used the Covid pause to reflect on and reset the programme and to consider the direction and structures for the final phase of delivery. Part of that consideration is about how the remobilisation of best start and, specifically, introduction of continuity of carer, could be prioritised to focus on people who would benefit most.

I will conclude there. All that work, combined with the work that has already been mentioned in the debate, provides a solid foundation from which we can continue to deliver positive mental health outcomes for parents and children across Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Paul O'Kane to wind up the debate on behalf of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee.

15:53

Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): I am pleased to close the debate on behalf of my colleagues in the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee and, as deputy convener of the committee, I thank the team of clerks and support staff who assist the committee in our work, and who supported the inquiry and the preparation of the report that we debate today.

I join colleagues in thanking everyone who submitted evidence. I thank all the organisations that shared their views or supported people to share their views, many of which have been mentioned in the debate.

In particular, I want to thank—as the convener, Gillian Martin, has done—the women and their families who gave oral evidence to the committee. It was a difficult thing to do to give that evidence, but the evidence was compelling, and it was

important in the production of the report. I was reflecting this morning with the convener about the deeply personal nature of what was shared and how, while common themes emerged, each experience is different, with different supports needed at different times. We have heard a lot about that this afternoon. Access to appropriate services, including primary care services, community services, third sector services, specialist mental health services and specialist perinatal mental health services, is often a major barrier for individuals who need support.

The committee also heard that women who have experienced miscarriage or baby loss are extremely vulnerable. Again, that has been reflected in the debate.

As a committee, we have sought to shine a light on an area of our health service that is, all too often, somewhat forgotten, underresourced and not always planned with the care and sensitivity required. As Gillian Martin said, the committee wanted to shine not just a spotlight but a floodlight on the issue. We want to end stigma and open doors for people.

In that regard, the evidence that we heard about women affected by baby loss being treated in maternity wards alongside women who have given birth to healthy babies was particularly compelling. There is a clear need for specialist provision across Scotland. That was outlined powerfully by Emma Harper in relation to her constituent in Dumfries. I note what Maree Todd said about what can be done to push forward the committee's recommendations in that regard.

I turn to some of those recommendations and, in doing so, I highlight the strong contributions to the debate—it has been not just a powerful debate but an emotional one for many colleagues. Access to perinatal mental health services was a key part of our recommendations. There has been a large degree of consensus across the chamber about the importance of increasing awareness of services, early identification of perinatal mental health issues and ensuring that our pathways are robust and able to deliver joined-up care.

Many members mentioned mother and baby units and the importance of ensuring that such units are provided across the country. Along with colleagues, I note Kevin Stewart's commitment to being in listening mode and taking action in that regard. The committee would welcome that and would be keen to continue that discussion as we move forward. We need to ensure that when people need services, those services are available in the communities where they live. I am sure that the committee would seek to engage with the consultation that the minister outlined in his remarks.

The committee was keen to see the Scottish Government secure current and future funding to ensure equity of access to specialist community mental health services throughout Scotland. Carol Mochan pointed to the gaps that exist in specialist community services, and said that we need to do more to ensure equity of provision. Alex Cole-Hamilton—who is not in the chamber—spoke about the postcode lottery that sometimes exists in access to those services.

We heard a lot of strong contributions from colleagues about the work of the third sector. Colleagues gave powerful examples of that work. The committee met organisations such as Fife Gingerbread, Home-Start, Aberlour, Mind Mosaic and of course Sands, the baby loss charity. It is important that we continue to ensure sustainable funding for those organisations to deliver on their vital work. I note what Maree Todd said about what funding is available, but I am keen that we continue to monitor that and audit what funding is available across all sectors to ensure that we continue to drive forward that important work.

Workforce formed a strong part of the committee's recommendations. Colleagues rightly raised some of the issues that are currently affecting the workforce across midwifery and nursing. Sandesh Gulhane, Gillian Mackay, Carol Mochan and others spoke about the pressures on staff, the burnout that is being experienced and the need for not only retention but further recruitment. Craig Hoy made a strong point about ensuring that there is a balance between those two things and that we continue to have people who are available to support mothers when they need that support.

I am conscious of the time, but there is a lot to pack in, as the minister said—this has been a full debate.

Stephanie Callaghan spoke powerfully about the importance of listening to women and of understanding that trauma can manifest itself in many different ways. We must meet people where they are. Indeed, the committee has made strong recommendations on ensuring appropriate resources to support staff in diagnosing that trauma, on developing care pathways to prevent and treat birth trauma and on providing dedicated treatment not only before birth but after birth, ensuring that support is on-going, certainly in the early stages.

Martin Whitfield made an important point about the needs of our refugee families in Scotland. That is particularly pertinent for us all in this current period.

Sue Webber spoke powerfully about baby loss, which is very important, and it is very personal to Sue Webber—and indeed to many of us in the

chamber, who have friends, family or relatives who have experienced that.

Natalie Don spoke powerfully about the impact of Covid-19 on women who were expecting children and had children during the period of the pandemic. As a mum herself, she spoke very powerfully about the need for support and continuing with support groups throughout the pandemic. There are key lessons for us all to learn about how we have reacted to the pandemic and about how services have continued to get back on track and on stream. Audrey Nicoll spoke about some of those challenges, too, in particular regarding isolation.

The committee believes that the report should act as a strong catalyst for change in this hugely important part of our health service. We are clear that we will work with Government further. We will hold it to account and we will collaborate with organisations across Scotland to ensure that we get this right for women, babies and families across the country, continuing to ensure that the light that we spoke about at the beginning of the debate can shine, and that nobody is left in the darkness.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the committee debate. I remind all members that, if they participate in a debate, they should be here for the closing speeches. That is the courteous way to proceed.

If members wish to change positions before the next item of business, they should do so now. While they are doing that, I remind them of the Covid measures that are in place. Face coverings should be worn when moving around the chamber and across the Holyrood campus.

Scottish Local Government Elections (Candidacy Rights of Foreign Nationals) Bill: Stage 1

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a stage 1 debate on motion S6M-03818, in the name of George Adam, on the Scottish Local Government Elections (Candidacy Rights of Foreign Nationals) Bill.

16:02

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (George Adam): I begin by thanking the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee and the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee for their scrutiny of the bill. The bill is progressing according to an expedited timetable, and I am grateful to both committees for their careful consideration of it.

In 2020, the Parliament agreed to a substantial extension of voting and candidacy rights in relation to Scottish Parliament and local government elections. All foreign nationals with any form of leave to remain were granted voting rights. That was an important signal, welcoming all those who choose to make Scotland their home.

Although the right to stand in Scottish Parliament and local government elections was also extended, that was limited to those foreign nationals with indefinite leave to remain in the United Kingdom. For European Union nationals, the new law ensured that all those with settled status or pre-settled status could stand in Scottish devolved elections. However, people with limited leave to remain—for example, those with the right to remain in the UK for a 30-month period—cannot stand in Scottish devolved elections. The bill responds to four treaties that the UK Government has agreed in relation to voting and candidacy rights in local government elections. Those treaties have been agreed with Portugal, Luxembourg, Spain and Poland. They seek to allow nationals of those countries to vote and stand in UK elections on the same basis as UK citizens. The treaties also provide that UK citizens can vote and stand for election in local government elections in the countries subject to the treaties.

The bill that is before Parliament is tightly focused on the treaties. Because our law on voting rights is already one of the most generous in the world, no change is needed in that area. The bill is therefore restricted to ensuring compliance with the treaties in relation to candidacy rights.

The bill will extend local government candidacy rights to any nationals of Portugal, Luxembourg,

Spain and Poland who have a limited form of leave to remain in the United Kingdom. I should stress that EU nationals with settled and pre-settled status already have candidacy rights in our elections, so the extension is unlikely to affect a substantial number of people.

The bill will also ensure that the law can be updated if and when additional treaties are signed or if existing ones are cancelled. The Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee has suggested a change to the bill to make it clear that, if a treaty is cancelled, ministers will be obliged to remove those rights. I will further consider that point ahead of stage 2.

Because the bill is focused on compliance with treaties, it does not seek to make wider changes to electoral law on candidacy. It does not affect countries when a treaty has not been agreed and it does not apply to Scottish Parliament elections. However, the Government has ambitions to extend candidacy rights further. Last year, in the shared policy programme, we committed to developing legislation on electoral reform to enable more people to stand as candidates in Scottish Parliament and local government elections.

My intention is to consider the issues surrounding a wider expansion of candidacy rights—for example, to all foreign nationals with limited leave to remain or to 16 and 17-year-olds. I plan to consult later this year on that subject alongside a number of other electoral reform proposals. The proposal would be to introduce legislation at a later date. As I continue interactions with the committee, I have noted on a number of occasions that the proposal seems to get larger and larger as we discuss it further. Nevertheless, I am open to any ideas that members may have in relation to electoral reform in Scotland.

In conclusion, I thank the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee and the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee for their consideration of the bill, and I look forward to this afternoon's debate.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Scottish Local Government Elections (Candidacy Rights of Foreign Nationals) Bill.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Martin Whitfield to speak on behalf of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee.

16:07

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow George Adam on this matter.

Prior to the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union, on 31 January 2020, all EU nationals who were resident in the United Kingdom could stand as candidates in United Kingdom local elections. Currently, British nationals, Commonwealth citizens and citizens of the Republic of Ireland can stand as candidates at local government elections in Scotland.

In addition, as mentioned, the Scottish Elections (Franchise and Representation) Act 2020 allowed "qualifying foreign nationals"—individuals who do not require leave under the Immigration Act 1971 to enter or remain in the UK, or who, if they do require such leave, have indefinite leave to remain or pre-settled status—to stand at Scottish Parliament and local government elections in Scotland. Thus, EU citizens who have settled or pre-settled status are already able to stand at local government and Scottish Parliament elections in Scotland.

The purpose of the bill is to allow a further category of individuals to stand for election, be elected and hold office as a member of a local authority in Scotland. Those are nationals of any country with which the UK has mutual candidacy rights at local elections because of a treaty. The provisions in the bill will ensure compliance with treaties that the UK Government has agreed to in relation to voting and candidacy rights in local government elections, notably in relation to treaties agreed with Portugal, Luxembourg, Spain and Poland, although some of those treaties have yet to come into force as they await, in part, the bill becoming law.

The bilateral agreements that the UK has entered into with Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal and Spain will, when in force, grant the nationals of those countries who are legally resident in the United Kingdom the right to stand as candidates at local elections, subject to the same conditions and disqualifications that apply to nationals of the United Kingdom.

For those with constitutional interest, the method for achieving that change is by making limited amendments to section 29 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, which sets out the eligibility requirements for nomination, election and holding office as a member of a local authority in Scotland. Section 29 of the 1973 act currently allows qualifying foreign nationals to stand as candidates in Scottish local government elections. That category covers foreign nationals—other than Commonwealth citizens and citizens of the Republic of Ireland—who do not require leave under the Immigration Act 1971 to enter or remain in the United Kingdom or who, if they require such leave, have indefinite leave to remain or pre-settled status. It therefore includes any nationals of Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal and Spain who

have settled or pre-settled status. The bill extends section 29 of the 1973 act to confer candidacy rights on all nationals of Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal and Spain who hold lawful immigration status in the United Kingdom.

As was explained in the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee and at the opening of the debate, at present, all foreign nationals with any form of leave to remain in the United Kingdom can vote in Scottish local government elections, but candidacy rights are limited to people with indefinite leave to remain or pre-settled status. There is an anticipation that most European Union nationals who are currently resident in Scotland already have candidacy rights. Voting rights have, of course, already been conferred by virtue of section 1 of the Scottish Elections (Franchise and Representation) Act 2020.

The committee notes the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee's report on the bill and is satisfied with the explanation that the minister provided, that the Scottish Government still considers that it would be required to amend the list of countries to properly reflect international treaty obligations and ensure that there is no unfair advantage in relation to candidacy rights. However, the committee recognises the point that the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee made, that a future Government might not consider itself bound to remove a country and that the Scottish ministers might exercise discretion in relation to the timing of the removal of a country from schedule 6A. The committee therefore supports the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee's call for the Scottish Government to lodge an amendment at stage 2 to address that issue. I welcome the comments that have been made today and, indeed, the assurances in correspondence that that issue will be looked at prior to stage 2, but I am slightly concerned about the caveat attached to the written response, that the Government feels that it and future Governments would be bound in the same way.

The committee recognises that it is unlikely that a scenario would arise whereby a by-election occurred as a result of a foreign national who had been elected as a councillor standing down because they were required to leave the country, but we believe that that remains a small but relevant possibility. The committee therefore calls on the Scottish Government to continue dialogue with local authorities so that it is aware of the potential for additional funding for elections in case there is a greater need for by-elections than is anticipated because of individuals being elected who have limited leave to remain.

The committee supports the principal purpose of the Scottish Local Government Elections (Candidacy Rights of Foreign Nationals) Bill, which is to give to certain foreign nationals the right to stand as candidates in local government elections in Scotland in accordance with internationally agreed treaties. The committee's scrutiny of the bill did not highlight any significant concerns, save for those that we have referred to. On that basis, the committee is content to recommend that the general principles of the bill be agreed to.

16:13

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): I congratulate Martin Whitfield on speaking for 360 seconds without hesitation, repetition or deviation.

I could stand here and simply say that we will support the bill and then sit down. I know that that would please the Presiding Officer, but it would disappoint the minister.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Kerr, I clarify that as I am the chair, I have no view.

Stephen Kerr: I am disappointed that you have no view on my sitting down.

It is a pleasure to speak in the debate. I pay tribute to all the people who put themselves forward for public office. That is an appropriate thing to say, especially in this week of all weeks, as nominations close for the elections to our local councils that will be held in May.

The Scottish Conservatives believe in local democracy—whether that means standing up for communities to enable them to decide on their future for themselves, or ensuring that local government has a fair share of funding from the Scottish Government. That belief is why we support the bill. People who have made a commitment to stay in Scotland, to be active and engaged in the community where they live, to raise families, to work in businesses and public services and to make friendships should absolutely be encouraged not only to have their say in the running of their community but to stand as candidates.

As has been mentioned a couple of times, the United Kingdom Government has agreed reciprocal candidacy arrangements with Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal and Spain. When the bill becomes law, the treaties will be ratified and people from those four countries who have moved to the UK since 1 January 2021 will have the right to stand in local elections. That is why the bill is needed.

By working together with the UK Government, we in Parliament should secure more such reciprocal arrangements. It is imperative that we be fully aware of the risks that are associated with

allowing candidacy rights when no reciprocal agreements exist. It is fair to say that we could be in danger of letting down expatriate Scots in other countries who do not enjoy such democratic rights in their host countries.

Becoming a local councillor is much more worth while when councillors and councils have real power. They need to have power and the funding to effect change. All of us will have come across issues of communities wanting change but their councils being powerless to do anything because of lack of funding, which has been cut relentlessly by a Scottish National Party Government that shows no respect for local government.

Councils are powerless because of a centralising agenda that puts policy and power in the hands of the Scottish Government and its agencies, rather than in the hands of local people. That is a real power grab.

Councils are powerless because our councillors—many of whom feel strongly about the issue—are increasingly hidebound by the stringent rulings of the Standards Commission for Scotland.

We should all acknowledge that council elections attract—sadly—relatively low turnout. We need to encourage more people to vote and to stand for office. It is sad that councillors are not always held in the esteem that they should be in their communities. Why is that? I think that it is because people feel that their local democracy does not influence what happens in their area.

Candidates who stand for public office want to be champions for their areas, but when they get on to a council, they find that they cannot do anything. They find that everything that they stood for when they were elected is out of their reach, because SNP cuts mean that they do not have the resources to fund local services properly and because they cannot change policies that have been set at the centre by the SNP Government, which interferes far too much in local government. Councillors cannot represent their constituents properly: many feel that the overly powerful Standards Commission makes them more mute than they want to be, so they cannot speak up as freely as they would like to on the issues that impact on their constituents.

Councils should be hives of democracy, where councillors can directly influence the lived experience of their constituents. That is why anyone would stand for election in the first place, to be frank. Local elections should be a way to judge the results of the approach that a councillor took to issues that they could influence and change. However, under the SNP, local democracy is a shadow of its former self.

The right to stand for election is sacrosanct. Presiding Officer, I recognise that I am probably in

the last few seconds of my allocated time. Is that correct?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have about six minutes for your speech.

Stephen Kerr: There are many other things that I would like to have said, but time in the chamber is precious. As a Conservative, it is my instinct to empower people and to disempower central Government and its agencies. I believe that power should be exercised as close to the people as possible. Decisions that are made by local people for local people should be sacrosanct, and allowing all local people the opportunity to stand, as we will—which will be made more realisable with the passing of the bill—is something that we support. We will support the bill today.

16:20

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): I commend the work of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee on the bill. Scottish Labour supports the proposal to extend candidacy rights to nationals of any country with which the UK signs a treaty for mutual candidacy rights at local elections.

The bill will ensure that all nationals of Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal and Spain can stand as candidates in Scottish local government elections. The UK has entered into treaties with those countries in order to allow their nationals to be candidates here. As the minister said, the bill will put it into law that having leave to remain in the UK is sufficient to allow them to stand for election. Therefore, the bill is an important step towards ensuring compliance with treaties that the UK Government has agreed in relation to candidacy in Scottish local government elections.

The bill also represents an opportunity for us all in the chamber to affirm the value of non-UK nationals in our political, social and cultural life. As the May local government elections approach, many of us will be acutely aware of the value and importance of good local candidates, whom we have heard about recently and who are embedded and involved in their local communities.

We should also be aware of how often, in modern Scotland, it is people who are born in other countries who represent the best examples of people who are embedded and invested in their local communities. Those who have come to stay, settle and build lives in communities that are far from their place of birth can be the greatest and most dedicated local champions. It is easy to see the bill as something that will benefit only a small number of people—namely, those who aspire to stand for election. That is important and valuable, but there are, potentially, many more

beneficiaries—namely, the people who might vote for and be represented by those people.

The bill will affirm and extend the right of all people in Scotland to vote for candidates who were born beyond our shores but who have come here to live, work and enrich our communities. The bill should be commended and celebrated on that basis.

Scottish Labour believes that, as the bill progresses, the minister and the Government should consider a number of points. First, there is a concern that the committee discussed in its report—that nationals from the same country could have different candidacy rights based solely on their immigration status.

Secondly, as we have already heard, the committee recognised the point that was made by the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee, that a future Government might not consider itself to be bound to remove a country from schedule 6A, and that Scottish ministers might exercise discretion in relation to such removal. Therefore, the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee

“supports the DPLRC’s call for the Scottish Government to bring forward an amendment at Stage 2 to address this issue.”

Scottish Labour supports that call, so we hope that the bill can be amended with Scottish Government support.

Martin Whitfield: Does Neil Bibby agree that it is not only the question of whether a country is removed; it is the question of the time that it could take to remove it from the schedule, which might well influence local government elections?

Neil Bibby: Yes, I absolutely agree with that.

The committee also recognised that it is unlikely, but possible, that a by-election could occur if a foreign national is required to leave the country

“due to a change in their immigration status.”

That would have obvious financial implications.

The minister will be aware that Renfrewshire residents are still fuming about the waste of £16,000 of their money on a council by-election in Paisley, which had to be aborted because Renfrewshire Council had not done its homework. That was an exceptional case, but the fact remains that council by-elections cost money, and at a time of on-going cuts to local government budgets, that is money that councils and residents can ill afford to lose. Therefore, we call on the Scottish Government to ensure that local authorities are aware of the potential need for additional funding for elections if individuals who have limited leave to remain are elected.

I welcome the minister's commitment to reviewing the situation as necessary, and I hope that he can give assurances that local authorities and their residents will not suffer financially. I also hope that ministers will liaise with local authorities over the potential need for additional funding.

I hope that the Scottish Government can consider those matters as the bill progresses. Scottish Labour will support the bill at decision time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. Bob Doris joins as remotely.

16:24

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): As the deputy convener of the Scottish Parliament's Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, I thank the committee convener and my committee colleagues for their work. We were ably guided by the clerking team, and we had open and constructive engagement with George Adam, the Minister for Parliamentary Business.

The committee is more or less unanimous in its views on the bill. The UK Government has signed treaties with Portugal and Luxembourg that have already come into force, and similar treaties with Spain and Poland will come into force shortly. Those treaties offer reciprocal candidacy rights to nationals who are resident in each other's countries. The bill will ensure that those rights can be exercised in Scotland at council elections, as they should be. We all support that. Given that those from EU countries with indefinite leave to remain or pre-settled status will already have such rights, the numbers impacted are likely to be small, as we have already heard. However, this is absolutely the right thing to do.

We are starting from a strong position in Scotland. The Parliament has already passed the Scottish Elections (Franchise and Representation) Act 2020, section 1 of which extended the franchise of Scottish elections to include all those with the legal right to live in Scotland by creating the new category of voter that the convener alluded to: qualifying foreign national. Consequently, any period of leave to remain at all entitles a person to register to vote and cast their vote. That means that people who, for example, have been granted refugee status or asylum will be able to vote, as long as they satisfy the conditions of living in Scotland, as well as the other conditions that apply to all electors in Scottish elections, including being over 16 years of age. Unfortunately, however, individuals who are seeking asylum but whose claim is still undetermined cannot vote.

There is also a gap between voting and candidacy rights in Scotland more generally. Anyone with any form of leave to remain could vote but only those with indefinite leave to remain can be a candidate. That said, the bill still places Scotland at the forefront of democratic engagement and the advancement of rights for all those resident in our country.

One aspect of the bill that the committee looked at was whether the rights that are being extended to foreign nationals of the four EU nations on a reciprocal basis based on UK treaty obligations could be rescinded should those treaties no longer be in force, to ensure that candidacy rights would be removed accordingly. The committee wanted to ensure that rights conferred in section 6A to the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, which are essentially based on those treaty obligations, could not be used on a discretionary basis in such circumstances. Our committee was broadly satisfied but acknowledged the concerns of the DPLR Committee in that area, as we have heard. I agree that it would be welcome to have reassurances by way of an amendment at stage 2. On balance, I think that that would be helpful.

However, it is with some irony that I highlight that aspect. By and large, I would wish all EU nationals resident in Scotland to have such candidacy rights, not just those who have them extended by dint of a UK treaty or because they have pre-settled status. In that respect, I do not concur with Stephen Kerr's comments. It is a shame that Parliament's hybrid proceedings do not allow for interventions, Presiding Officer.

I can reconcile my contradictions, as the Scottish Government will be consulting on legislation on electoral reform that enables more people to stand as candidates in Scottish Parliament and local elections. That will look at potentially extending candidacy rights to all EU nationals resident in Scotland and, indeed, to other groups, not simply those from Spain, Portugal, Poland and Luxembourg. I commend the Scottish Government for its approach and I look forward to such legislation superseding any UK treaty. I have to admit that I rather like the idea of some UK treaties being consigned to history, particularly those stretching back over 300 years.

Presiding Officer, I added in that final bit to ensure that my colleagues in the chamber are still paying attention. I close by commending the general principles of the bill to Parliament.

16:29

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): In 2020, the Scottish Parliament passed the Scottish Elections (Franchise and Representation) Bill, which expanded the franchise and candidacy

eligibility for local and Holyrood elections. The 2020 act expanded voting rights to everyone lawfully resident in Scotland, regardless of nationality and candidacy rights, and candidacy rights to everyone with indefinite leave to remain.

At the moment, only foreign nationals with indefinite leave to remain in Scotland have the right to stand as candidates in Scottish elections, whether for local government or for Holyrood. That includes EU nationals with settled or pre-settled status. However, the 2020 act did not confer candidacy rights on people with temporary forms of leave to remain. The Senedd made similar changes to the local government and Senedd franchise in 2020.

As things stand, EU nationals who are lawfully resident in England have retained their right to vote and to stand in local elections. Through the UK Elections Bill, which aims to remove voting and candidacy rights from EU citizens who arrived in the UK after 31 December 2020, the UK Government is hell-bent on restricting the franchise further. That leaves us where we are, with stage 1 of the Scottish Local Government Elections (Candidacy Rights of Foreign Nationals) Bill.

Following Brexit, the UK Government has already entered into treaties with Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal and Spain that confer reciprocal voting and candidacy rights for their nationals in the UK and UK nationals in those respective countries. That includes anyone with lawful residence, not just people with settled status, pre-settled status or indefinite leave to remain. In some cases, those treaties cannot be fully ratified until they are enshrined in law in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The Scottish bill will ratify existing treaties to ensure that legislation across the four nations is consistent. It will result in an expansion of candidacy rights for local government elections to some EU nationals who are living in Scotland with limited leave to remain.

The Scottish Parliament does not currently have the right to confer legal residence or citizenship on people who live here, but we do have the power to make our electoral franchise as inclusive as possible. Therefore, the Scottish Greens would like to see us go further and ensure that candidacy rights mirror voting rights. If we want a residence-based franchise, that must extend to candidacy rights.

Ensuring that everyone who lives in Scotland has the ability to vote and to stand for election should be an aspiration that we all share. The bill is a step in the right direction, but it risks creating an unequal patchwork of candidacy rights that gives people from a select few countries enhanced

rights compared with others. That is something that we should seek to fix.

Let us take refugees as an example. They are initially granted five years' leave to remain and can then apply for indefinite leave to remain. People in that position cannot stand as a candidate purely because of the type of leave to remain that the Home Office has decided to grant them. We know that we need more diverse representation in elected positions. Our elected bodies at all levels should reflect the people whom they serve, and creating a truly residence-based franchise and candidacy eligibility is an important part of fixing the problem. Otherwise, we will be left in a situation in which people are potentially not able to represent their communities for two or more electoral cycles. We need more young people to stand for election, but the situation could deny young refugees such as those coming from Ukraine that ability for a long time.

The big question is whether it is fair and proportionate to exclude someone from standing for election just because the Home Office has given them a temporary visa. The Scottish Greens remain committed to pursuing electoral reform that enables more people to stand as candidates at Scottish Parliament and local government elections and we look forward to working with the minister and the Scottish Government to achieve that. However, although we would like to see future legislation go further, we will be supporting the bill at stage 1.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Willie Coffey is joining us remotely.

16:33

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): I intend to speak to the motion, unlike the unfortunate rants that we heard earlier from the first Tory speaker, which were a shame.

Although the bill must be one of the shortest ever seen in Parliament, it is certainly significant because of what it does. All our speeches in the debate will probably be longer than the bill, but it is important to bring it to the attention of the Scottish people through the debate.

A treaty arrangement entered into by the UK Government will enable certain people from Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal and Spain to put themselves forward to be local councillors in Scotland. I support the bill because it continues in a direction of travel that I think it is right for Scotland to take. It builds on what we have already done in Scotland with respect to candidacy rights and it continues that goal of widening our democratic engagement.

Normally, the right to be a candidate depends on whether a person has indefinite leave to remain in the UK or whether they have pre-settled status. The bill, if passed, will enable people from the countries that have been mentioned who do not have settled or pre-settled status to become candidates, if they wish to do so. That is in line with the agreements that are proposed by the treaty arrangements.

Extending and conferring the right on people who live in Scotland to become local councillors representing their communities is to be welcomed, and I am sure that people from those countries that we have mentioned who live in Scotland and wish to become councillors will greatly appreciate this move by the Scottish Parliament. We know that only a small number of people might be affected by the bill and might take advantage of it, but it sends a clear signal that Scotland intends to continue with progressive and inclusive democratic reforms.

As ever, Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee members have done a good job of scrutinising the bill, and their stage 1 report provides us with the detail that we need to help us to understand what has been proposed and why.

However, the report raises one or two questions that require answers. In examining the proposals and their possible consequences, the committee rightly asked what might happen if a person became a councillor and their immigration status subsequently changed, causing a by-election to occur. Although that is unlikely, it presents a possible risk, and the committee welcomed the minister's commitment to keep that aspect under review.

Similarly, the committee was right to ask what would happen if a treaty came to an end. That aspect is still a little unclear, especially if a person was already elected at that time, so I would welcome clarification from committee members or the minister as to what would happen in those circumstances. Presumably, another by-election might be needed.

This short bill is focused on supporting the treaties as they come into force. Ideally, this Parliament will agree its own arrangements in future, which will not come via treaties that are entered into by others. The Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee has diligently considered the bill and asked a number of questions about concerns that could arise in certain circumstances. The intention behind the bill is sound, and it opens up greater access to participating in a parliamentary democracy in Scotland.

As we look ahead, the bill can be amended, if necessary, to go a step further to extend candidacy rights to all foreign nationals. The Scottish Government intends to consult on those issues this year. For the moment, we should thank the committee for the work that it has done on our behalf and welcome the bill at stage 1. I hope that it will receive the support that it deserves as it progresses through the parliamentary stages to become law in Scotland.

16:37

Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP): I remind members of my entry in the register of members' interests.

As a new member of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, I have had the opportunity to attend a couple of meetings as part of the committee's scrutiny of the proposed Scottish Local Government Elections (Candidacy Rights of Foreign Nationals) Bill.

The bill increases the opportunities for democratic engagement and ensures that we comply with international treaties. In the past, all EU citizens who were resident in the UK could stand in local elections. However, following Brexit, the Scottish Government introduced legislation to ensure that those EU nationals with settled or pre-settled status who had made Scotland their home could stand for elected office and vote in Scottish Parliament and local government elections.

The bill extends that right to nationals of a country with which the UK Government has signed a treaty on mutual voting and candidacy rights. Currently, the UK has agreed such treaties with Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal and Spain. By enabling people from those countries who do not have settled or pre-settled status to stand in local elections, the bill will support the ratification of those treaties.

In its stage 1 report, the SPPA Committee concluded that the bill provides an effective approach to complying with international treaties signed by the UK Government and other states.

Although the reforms in the bill will affect only a small proportion of the population, they will ensure that more people can represent their local community as a councillor. The SNP stands for progressive and inclusive democratic reform and has already delivered in government.

Scotland already goes further than most other countries in allowing all resident foreign nationals with any form of leave to remain to vote in Scottish Parliament and Scottish local government elections, so it is important to recognise that the bill builds on the Scottish Government's work to expand democratic engagement and participation.

The bill is not the end of that journey. As the minister has said, the Scottish Government will consult on further electoral reforms later this year. At a recent committee meeting, I questioned the minister about the potential implications of someone with limited leave to remain being elected as a councillor and then having to leave the country part way through their term, leading to a by-election. The committee's report mentions that possibility, and we welcomed the minister's commitment to review the situation as necessary. Following the publication of the report, the minister also confirmed that the Scottish Government supports the committee's conclusion and that the issue will be highlighted to the convener of the Electoral Management Board for Scotland. I welcome that.

Although Scotland already goes to greater lengths than many countries in allowing resident foreign nationals to vote and stand in elections, the bill will further expand the opportunities for people to serve as a councillor. The Scottish Government has agreed with the majority of the SPPA Committee's conclusions and will reflect on possible stage 2 amendments. Given that, and the positive outcomes that the bill will support, I hope that all members will agree that the bill's general principles are worthy of support.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to closing speeches. Mark Griffin joins us remotely.

16:42

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): As my colleague Neil Bibby confirmed, we will support the bill. We are keen to extend candidacy rights to nationals of any country with which the UK signs a treaty on mutual candidacy rights at local elections when they have any type of leave to remain. The bill will ensure compliance with treaties that have been agreed with Portugal, Poland, Spain and Luxembourg. In the case of Spain and Poland, the bill is required as part of the ratification process on their side.

There has been some discussion about such legislation being a consequence of the United Kingdom leaving the EU. That matter was raised by the convener of the SPPA Committee and by other speakers. It is right to say that, prior to the UK's exit, all EU nationals who were resident in the UK could stand as candidates in UK local government elections. That right currently extends to Irish citizens and people from the Commonwealth under the 1973 act.

As the SPPA Committee discussed, the Scottish Elections (Franchise and Representation) Act 2020 allows someone with no immigration restrictions, indefinite leave to remain or pre-settled status to vote in Scottish Parliament and

Scottish local government elections. The bill goes further by allowing someone with any type of leave to remain to vote and stand in local government elections, as long as they are from a listed country in schedule 6A. Given that the arrangements are reciprocal, British citizens will be able to vote and stand in local elections in Spain, Portugal, Poland and Luxembourg.

As the SPPA Committee and the DPLR Committee discussed, it is sensible that the bill grants ministers powers to add other countries to the list by regulation if the UK enters into similar treaties with them. I am grateful to the minister for confirming, as he did when he spoke to the committee, that a Government amendment at stage 2 will require that ministers remove a schedule 6A country should a treaty be terminated.

With the local elections just five weeks away, candidates across the country will be canvassing voters for their support. Obviously, we want people from all over Scotland, including those who have made Scotland their home, to stand for election to local councils. People do so to have the opportunity to make real changes in the communities that they live in and wish to represent and to make decisions on services that affect people's daily lives, such as social care, children's education, housing and economic development, as well as the core issues of local roads, cleanliness and refuse collections.

It is a great privilege to be elected to the role, but it is not without its challenges, such as online abuse and harassment and a demoralised workforce. Those who are elected will take on a full-time job with long hours. As we have repeatedly discussed in the chamber, millions of pounds have been ring fenced and taken out of local control and, since 2013, £918 million has been slashed in real terms from budgets. Therefore, regardless of who stands, we know that candidates who go on to be elected this year are likely to have to make more cuts while they struggle to keep up with demand for local services.

For today's purposes, however, I am pleased that we can widen the candidacy rights to the people of Poland, Spain, Portugal and Luxembourg. We support the bill at stage 1.

16:46

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I thank the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee for its work. I am glad to speak in the debate, and I welcome the positive progress that is being made in extending candidacy rights to eligible citizens from Poland, Spain, Portugal and Luxembourg. Although the bill might not be

generating headlines, it is an important piece of legislation.

The United Kingdom Elections Bill as drafted is designed to clarify the voting and candidacy rights of key groups of citizens in this country. It is important to note that European Union nationals who were resident in the United Kingdom before 31 December fall into the category of having retained rights and are fully eligible to stand as candidates and vote in elections. The bill that we are considering today simply aims to expand candidacy rights to include people from named countries with any type of leave to remain in the United Kingdom as well as those with settled or pre-settled status.

It is reassuring to note, as others have done, that neither the Electoral Commission nor the Electoral Management Board for Scotland has expressed any particular concern about the bill. I note from Mr Adam's response on the bill to the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee that the Scottish Government will reflect on an amendment to the bill that would give greater clarity to the Scottish Government's obligation to remove a country from the schedule. I think that Mr Adam suggested in his opening speech that he will lodge an amendment on that at stage 2.

As others have outlined, the council elections are an important opportunity to refresh our democracy. I hope that they will also be an opportunity to elect more diverse councils that better reflect their local communities. For example, a record number of female and black, Asian and minority ethnic candidates will stand for my party at the election. Across the chamber, all parties have taken positive steps to try to improve candidate diversity at the election. The Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee, of which I am a member, will undertake additional work in that area after the council elections to review the impact of the election results.

For the millions or hundreds of thousands of people who, I am sure, will be watching this debate, there are now just under 24 hours until 4 pm tomorrow to submit their nomination papers. I genuinely hope that people who want change in their local community will do just that and stand for election, as all of us have done, to make the positive change that they want.

The minister suggested that a wider election bill is likely to be forthcoming, which will be consulted on. I hope that we will see a number of reforms in that. I think that councillor remuneration is an issue. The Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee has heard that a number of councillors have decided to stand down at the forthcoming elections for career reasons.

We also need measures on the support that is available to councillors to serve their local constituents. We MSPs are lucky to have the support that we have for staff and communications, but councillors have very different support available to them. I hope that that can be reformed, too, and that support will not just be based on whether a council decides to provide it.

I have previously raised with the minister the idea that we need to consider the provision to councillors of a free mail election address, which MPs and MSPs are entitled to, especially given the current size of single transferable vote wards and, potentially, larger wards after Boundaries Scotland undertakes its review after the council elections. I hope that all parties will reflect on bringing that forward.

Overall, however, the bill is a measured and uncontroversial step. The extension of the franchise is limited to nationals of the handful of countries with which the UK has signed reciprocal agreements. We will therefore support the bill at decision time, and will welcome future such agreements that the UK Government may reach with other countries. The bill seeks to bring Scottish legislation into line with the nationwide UK law. That is a welcome step forward.

16:50

George Adam: Miles Briggs cut me to the quick when he said that nobody will write headlines about the debate—he has absolutely damaged my ego.

Miles Briggs: That will depend on what you say.

George Adam: Anything can happen in the next five minutes, right enough. [*Laughter.*]

At one point, when Mr Briggs was talking about the millions of people who are watching at home, I thought that he was going to give the boxing announcer Michael Buffer's famous line:

"Let's get ready to rumble!"

I hope that he was not implying that this is a rumble. He brought up some key points, and I encourage him to engage with the consultation process when it comes up later this year, and we can have on-going discussions.

This has been a meaningful debate and I thank all the members who contributed to it. Although the bill is short and narrowly focused—Willie Coffey mentioned how narrow and how focused it was, saying that his speech would be longer than some parts of the bill—we will meet all our international obligations, should it go through.

As many colleagues said, who can stand in our elections is a fundamental part of our democracy. I look forward to further debate on that over the coming year.

Martin Whitfield: Will the minister give way?

George Adam: Yes; I was just going to mention Mr Whitfield.

Martin Whitfield: I anticipate that debate eagerly.

Is the minister able confirm to Willie Coffey that, should a treaty fall, the right to be a councillor would similarly fall, and that, if there is a danger that the immigration status of an individual who is covered by a treaty should change, their right to be a councillor should stand? Perhaps for the millions who are watching, will the minister confirm that, of course, the bill will not apply to what happens on 5 May this year?

George Adam: On the member's last question, the answer is yes.

On Mr Coffey's question, if a treaty comes to an end while an election is under way, transitional steps will ensure that there is no prejudice to that on-going election. However, the odds of such a thing happening at such a time—although it is possible—would be incredible.

Mr Whitfield, who convenes the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, brought up the idea that this Scottish Government and future Governments may not stand by future treaties. That was brought up at committee as well. I said that we will look at that as we move into stage 2, because it is one of the issues that the committee made very obvious to me.

One of the other things that Mr Whitfield brought up in committee—he did so again today—was the potential for there to be by-elections if someone should put their name forward who is not eligible. At the committee meeting, I said that the funding of local government elections is for local government. That is correct, but such a small number of individuals would be involved that it would not add to the number of by-elections over a period. However, as I have said, we continue to engage with local government on that issue.

Stephen Kerr took to his feet and spoke about absolutely everything bar the bill itself. He said that he could say that he was going to agree with me and could therefore sit down. I wish that he had, because he went on to talk about other things that we can debate at other times. For me, it is important that we focus on the bill and on what it does for the individuals and communities that it affects.

Mr Kerr spoke about local government, but he seems not to be aware that the UK Government

has cut core funds for local government by 63 per cent over the past decade. Perhaps I will cut and paste a bit of Mr Kerr's speech from the *Official Report* and send it down to a Westminster equivalent of his to see what they think of it.

To answer Mr Bibby's question, I say that the bill is what it is and does what it sets out to do. As I said, I—like Mr Bibby—have aspirations for electoral reform, and I am committed to future consultation and to looking at different ways of working. Again, that will be part of the consultation process that we will go through.

I move on to Mr Doris, who I have known for more years than both of us care to remember. As always, I was listening to him, and I agree with him. Perhaps not everyone picked up his point, but he will not be surprised to hear that I agree with him on the issue that he was talking about.

Gillian Mackay was passionate about her desire to ensure that more people get the right to vote and that that actually happens. Again, the consultation will give us the opportunity to engage on that point. Collette Stevenson said that she has not taken part in many committee meetings, but she gets what the bill is about, and she summarised eloquently what we are trying to do with it. I look forward to engaging with Ms Stevenson on the bill in the future at committee.

This has been a very good debate. As I said, the bill does what it says on the tin. Effectively, it aims to ensure that the small percentage of individuals in question have the opportunity to get involved in local government. Sometimes, in ensuring that we get to a particular place, we need to be careful that we do not tie ourselves in knots by thinking that there might be problems where there are not.

I often say to members when we discuss this very issue that only a small percentage of us get involved and put our names forward for elected office. Of that small percentage, those of us who are elected end up spending the rest of the time knocking each other on the head with a big stick and falling out with each other. Members have talked about the potential for by-elections. Having looked at that, I think that there might not be as many by-elections as some individuals might be concerned about.

As I said, I will take on board just about everything that all members have said today. Although the bill had to be brought forward at an accelerated pace, I am pleased that it has attracted wide-ranging support in the chamber today. I hope that members will join me in supporting the principles of the bill, and I look forward to further debates.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the stage 1 debate on the Scottish Local Government Elections (Candidacy Rights of Foreign Nationals) Bill.

Business Motion

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-03853, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out changes to this week's business.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees to the following revision to the programme of business for Thursday 31 March 2022—

delete

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:
Constitution, External Affairs and Culture

and insert

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
Constitution, External Affairs and Culture

followed by Ministerial Statement: Interim Principles for Responsible Investment in Natural Capital—[George Adam].

16:57

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): Over the weekend, there were some extraordinary revelations from former Scottish Government economic adviser Jim McColl regarding his company being awarded ferry contracts by the Scottish Government. McColl told *The Sunday Times*:

"The audit report has revealed we were given the contract for political purposes. Everything was about the optics and timing the announcements for political gain."

That claim has been supported by a senior Scottish National Party source, who said:

"It was all done and dusted to give a big conference headline ... for ... Nicola's first Holyrood election as leader."

Following those reports, I wrote to the Minister for Parliamentary Business twice, requesting that a statement be made by the First Minister tomorrow on the unravelling scandal. I received no responses to my emails, but the minister confirmed at the Business Bureau meeting today that the First Minister would not be delivering a statement.

On Thursday, in response to questions from Douglas Ross on the issue, the First Minister said:

"The buck stops with me."—[Official Report, 24 March 2022; c 12.]

Those words now ring hollow.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Nonsense.

Stephen Kerr: The member might say, "Nonsense," but those words ring hollow—[*Interruption.*] Exactly—she more likely meant "passing the buck".

My amendment would insert a statement as the first item of tomorrow afternoon's business, at which time I know the First Minister is available.

I expect that SNP members will vote against my amendment—on what is nothing more than cover-up orders from their boss, while they further their plans to throw former ministers under the bus. I hope, however, that all other members of the Scottish Parliament, including members of the Scottish Greens, find the backbone to stand up to the SNP's secret Scotland and back my amendment. It is time we had answers.

I move amendment S6M-03853.2, to insert after "business for":

"(a) Wednesday 30 March 2022—

after

2:00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

insert

followed by First Minister's Statement: Scottish Government Handling of Ferries Contracts;

(b)".

17:00

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): My amendment to the business motion would also insert in this week's business a statement from the First Minister on ferry procurement.

The ferry procurement disaster is one of the biggest public procurement disasters of the past 20 years. Ferries for Scotland's islands are five years late and two and a half times over budget.

As the Audit Scotland report makes clear, there is a lot of blame to go round. Last week, the First Minister tried to blame Derek Mackay for the enormous risk to which the taxpayer was exposed, and today Kate Forbes tried to pin all the blame elsewhere. It is clear that only a public inquiry will get to the bottom of all this.

However, right now, the Scottish Government is ultimately responsible for the promises that it made to islanders and the Ferguson Marine workforce, and it is the First Minister who is ultimately responsible for the Scottish Government. That is why, at the weekend, Opposition parties called for the First Minister to give an urgent statement on the matter.

Yesterday, Nicola Sturgeon said:

"I have no hesitation in answering any and all questions."

My amendment would provide her with the opportunity to do so.

When the First Minister was asked whether she had given the go-ahead to ignore Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd, she said:

“I didn’t say ‘don’t go ahead’”.

That explanation is simply not good enough. In the midst of a cost of living crisis, Scottish taxpayers are paying the costs of this Government’s failure. The First Minister must make the statement. Nicola Sturgeon needs to clarify the Government’s decision-making process in ignoring CMAL. She needs to clarify the Cabinet’s role, Keith Brown’s role, John Swinney’s role and her role in that decision.

It is one of the principal duties of the Parliament to hold the Government to account. Therefore, it is our duty to get to the bottom of what went wrong and how this fiasco unfolded.

The First Minister is very good at proclaiming—repeatedly—that she is ultimately responsible and takes responsibility. The place in which she should take responsibility is this chamber.

We need openness, honesty and transparency. We cannot afford secrecy and cover-up, and it would be scandalous if Nicola Sturgeon’s party’s members and the Greens used their votes to block a statement from the First Minister this week.

I move amendment S6M-03853.1, to insert after “business for”:

“(a) Wednesday 30 March 2022—

after

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

insert

followed by First Minister’s Statement: Ferry Procurement

(b)”.

17:03

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (George Adam): I will stick to the parliamentary process and how we are moving forward, although I am a bit concerned that Mr Kerr seems to think that he knows the First Minister’s diary and exactly where she is going to be at any time.

There has been full and significant scrutiny of the subject. The Parliament spent nearly four hours discussing the issue in the past week, between the cabinet secretary’s statement, the Conservative debate, First Minister’s question time and today’s topical question—and that is on top of the parliamentary inquiry.

There is currently no more to add. Any further time would simply be filled with yet more

interpretations of the report that Audit Scotland published last week. There have been many interpretations of that report from people outwith this Parliament.

Let us consider the background of the past week. On Wednesday 23 March, there was a Scottish Conservative debate on ferries, which lasted two hours and 49 minutes. On Thursday 24 March, at First Minister’s question time, the First Minister was on the floor of this chamber answering questions on the issue for 14 minutes. On Tuesday 29 March, a topical question from Mr Bibby was capably handled by the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy, Kate Forbes, who answered numerous questions from individuals. That was a further 12 minutes.

The situation will, quite rightly, be scrutinised further by the Scottish Parliament. However, at this time and at this moment, there is nothing further to add.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Stephen Kerr is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Neil Bibby will fall.

The question is, that amendment S6M-03853.2, in the name of Stephen Kerr, which seeks to amend motion S6M-03853, in the name of George Adam, setting out changes to this week’s business, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

There will be a short suspension to allow members to access the digital voting system.

17:06

Meeting suspended.

17:09

On resuming—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Stephen Kerr is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Neil Bibby will fall.

We move to the vote on amendment S6M-03853.2, in the name of Stephen Kerr, which seeks to amend motion S6M-03853, in the name of George Adam, setting out changes to this week’s business.

For

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

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

Against

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

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

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-03853.1, in the name of Stephen Kerr, is: For 52, Against 63, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-03853.1, in the name of Neil Bibby, which seeks to amend motion S6M-03853, in the name of George Adam, setting out changes to this week's business, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is now closed.

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I could not get the app to work. I would have voted yes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Halcro Johnston. That is now noted and recorded.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O’Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)

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

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-03853.1, in the name of Neil Bibby, is: For 51, Against 63, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-03853, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out changes to this week’s business, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (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)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

Against

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

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-03853, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out changes to this week's business, is: For 64, Against 51, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees to the following revision to the programme of business for Thursday 31 March 2022—

delete

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:
Constitution, External Affairs and Culture

and insert

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
Constitution, External Affairs and Culture

followed by Ministerial Statement: Interim Principles
for Responsible Investment in Natural
Capital.

Stephen Kerr: Cover-up!

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Stephen Kerr has a point of order.

Stephen Kerr: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. We have tried to bring the First Minister to the chamber of the Scottish Parliament to answer questions on the ferries scandal that is engulfing her Government, and we have failed. Can you advise us on how we might, in the name of open and transparent government, be able to fulfil our responsibilities as parliamentarians to hold the Government to account and scrutinise its actions in relation to the biggest scandal in public procurement since the establishment of the Scottish Parliament?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I thank Mr Kerr for his contribution. I will make two points. First, the Parliament has just had a vote on that matter and it voted in the way it voted, and that was the democratic result of the vote. Secondly, the member will be well aware that there will be other opportunities to pose questions on that topic or any other topic.

Decision Time

17:19

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): There is one question to be put as a result of today's business. The question is, that motion S6M-03818, in the name of George Adam, on the Scottish Local Government Elections (Candidacy Rights of Foreign Nationals) Bill at stage 1, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Scottish Local Government Elections (Candidacy Rights of Foreign Nationals) Bill.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Commonwealth Day 2022

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-03278, in the name of Sarah Boyack, on Commonwealth day 2022, which was on 14 March. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament celebrates Commonwealth Day 2022 on 14 March 2022, which has the theme, Delivering a Common Future, and aims to highlight how the member countries in the Commonwealth family are "innovating, connecting and transforming" to help achieve goals such as tackling climate change, promoting good governance and boosting trade; recognises the work of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association over the last 12 months, mainly through virtual meetings, in discussing a range of issues, including the response to COVID-19, encouraging greater diversity in parliaments and the climate emergency; considers that these will be key themes across 2022, as will the work of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians and the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities networks, and believes that the Scottish Parliament, in its relations with Commonwealth legislatures this session, will continue to share ideas, thoughts, experiences and best practice on how to make parliaments work effectively in holding governments to account on behalf of the people that they serve.

17:21

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): I thank colleagues across the chamber for supporting the motion, which celebrates Commonwealth day.

In recent weeks, our press and media have highlighted the Commonwealth's history and Britain's colonial past. However, it is important that we do not let our Commonwealth of nations be defined by history; we should also celebrate the relationships and friendships between countries, which are demonstrated by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, and think about how we shape our future. The CPA brings together countries across the world to work together.

This year's Commonwealth day theme was "Delivering a Common Future: Connecting, Innovating, Transforming." As the Queen said earlier this month in her Commonwealth day address, we should support one another and

"endeavour to ensure the Commonwealth remains an influential force for good in our world for many generations to come."

The CPA is a fascinating collaboration. It represents 53 sovereign countries and 17,000 elected representatives, and there are more than 180 branches across the CPA. That is a quite a thought. There is a huge opportunity for the Commonwealth countries to come together and work together across the nine different regions—Africa, Asia, Australia, Canada, the Caribbean,

Americas and Atlantic region, the India region, the Pacific region, the south-east Asia region, and our own British islands and Mediterranean region. There are different experiences and geographical connections, and there is a real challenge for all of us in how we act as parliamentarians and elected representatives to deliver for our constituents every day of the week; how we promote engagement; how we involve people in our democratic structures to change people's lives for the better; how we tackle the inequalities that exist across our world; and how we work together to tackle the global challenges that our world currently faces.

In the past two years, the Covid-19 pandemic has been a huge shock to our global economy, and it has changed the world as we know it. It has also exposed the inequalities between the well-developed nations and the global south in terms of vaccine distribution and the impact of Covid on people's health.

We know that we face a climate and nature emergency. Last year, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reported before the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26—on the critical need to avoid exceeding the 1.5°C temperature rise and, last month, of course, there was the Russian invasion of Ukraine. How we work in our own geographic areas and how we work together to tackle those unprecedented global challenges is absolutely critical.

We need to work together on long-standing challenges. The International Labour Organization has estimated that more than 40 million people worldwide—40 per cent of whom live in the Commonwealth—are victims of modern slavery. I was shocked to find that statistic. The Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative is promoting action, because one in every 150 people in the Commonwealth lives in modern slavery. That cannot be acceptable. There is work that we need to do together.

At the Commonwealth heads of Government meeting in the UK in 2018, every country committed to achieving the UN sustainable development goal of eradicating forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking by 2030. There are issues that we maybe do not regularly discuss in our Parliament but which affect Commonwealth citizens who are part of our CPA network. There is work to do in the UK to honour its commitment to end modern slavery. It must work with other nations, using its global influence, to transform people's lives. I think that we can all agree on that.

Last week, it was a huge honour to be a member of the delegation from the Scottish branch of the CPA, along with my colleagues, that

attended the 51st British islands and Mediterranean region regional conference on the Isle of Man. The theme was how we can improve scrutiny in our legislatures, and there were sessions on finance, diversity in our legislatures, and how we can make our legislatures the effective democracies that our citizens and our constituents need, in which we can exchange best practice and innovation and work together, rather than things to be taken for granted. There were some fantastic discussions, and we all agreed that we need to think about how we feed back to colleagues, because not everybody is at those events. We agreed that we need to think about how we feed back to ministers and members of Parliament and about how we work together.

Elena Whitham and I were at a women's branch meeting. She beamed in; I was privileged to be there in person. We discussed what more we need to do to ensure that delegations are gender balanced, for example. Even having women's representation is not something that we take for granted. Much more work needs to be done.

We were able to report on the work that we are going to do in the Scottish Parliament to look at women's involvement in the Parliament and to tackle gender inequalities. Even though we have our highest-ever level of representation, there is still much more that we need to do. We can also share knowledge and best practice with other legislatures, and learn about work that has been done elsewhere.

Climate change came up at the conference. I was privileged to chair an event, and that was really impactful for me because, in October, I was involved in an all-female panel of parliamentarians, with representatives from Bangladesh, Australia, Canada and Scotland, that looked at how we tackle climate change, whatever legislature we represent. We thought about the multilevel, multistakeholder and collaborative nature of how we need to tackle climate change. That is very much at the heart of the Commonwealth and the issue of loss and damage. Climate finance came up at COP26. Last week, it was really good to discuss what different countries and branches are doing in a practical sense.

If we think about the British, Irish and Mediterranean regions, we realise that there are a lot of seas and buildings and there is a lot of land out there. We got into a really practical discussion about our ambitions, what the challenges are, how we can share best practice, and the research. We have a lot of research in Scotland in particular. Work is being done in our island areas, and there are lessons that we could share with others. There are discussions about grid network challenges. A lot of the discussion was about things that we are working on here, as well.

It was really good to share those issues. Every one of us said that our legislature on its own will not solve the climate crisis. We all know that, and we all need to take a collective share in tackling the challenges that a lot of Commonwealth countries already face in respect of increased temperatures, sea level rises, storm surges, droughts and floods. We need to ensure that we use our expertise and knowledge to work with others.

That was a great session. It was about sharing our expertise and not just having ambitions but delivering in practice. I very much look forward to our conclusions being fed into the wider CPA network.

Commonwealth day gives all of us an opportunity to think about how we work on a cross-party basis and as Opposition members. One of the things that I found really interesting last week was that not all legislatures have party-political representatives. That would be a bit of a shock for us here. People who are not party-political representatives are very much the exception to the rule here, although there are people in some of our local authorities who are not in political parties. How do ministers, members of the Opposition and back benchers collectively use our own knowledge? How do we share that experience? How do we work together? How can we make the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association deliver for everybody across the globe?

I quite often think that we have a lot of work to do in the Parliament, as we have more responsibilities and more scrutiny issues. However, when we talk to colleagues in other legislatures, we realise that there are quite a lot of us in the Parliament. Our challenge is how we can use every minute that we have to the best effect.

I take the hint from the Presiding Officer: I will finish there. I very much look forward to the contributions of other members.

17:30

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): I am delighted to speak in this debate, and I thank Sarah Boyack for securing it.

As Sarah Boyack said, she, Jeremy Balfour and I were in the Isle of Man last week for the regional conference of the CPA, and I note that we are also the executive members of the Scottish parliamentary branch.

All three of the Scottish members actively participated in the conference and I am sure that colleagues will agree that the opportunity to meet, engage and learn from one another across the region is an excellent way for us to evaluate our

strengths and weaknesses in comparison to other Parliaments and Assemblies. It is clear that there is no one-size-fits-all set-up, and some of the activities that happen in our Parliament might not be suitable elsewhere. Notwithstanding that, there are parts of scrutiny that we undertake that certainly can help others to consider their actions in their Parliaments and Assemblies.

One of my contributions at the conference centred on what work has the highest impact and why. I discussed the recent inquiry by the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee into the use of the made affirmative procedure during the Covid pandemic. It is fair to say that, sadly, not every parliamentarian gets excited when delegated powers are discussed, but our committee inquiry certainly highlighted the importance of the procedure and its use over the last two years. After the presentation, I spoke to various delegates, and one of the Tynwald members was genuinely very interested in the procedure and will examine our report. Irrespective of our political leanings—or lack of them, which I mention because, as Sarah Boyack noted, many of the members of Commonwealth Parliaments and Assemblies are independent—we all agree that effective scrutiny and continual appraisal of procedures is absolutely important.

As the motion indicates, many of the meetings over the past 12 months have taken place virtually—in fact, that has been the case for the past two years. As a member of the CPA international executive committee, I know that every member of the committee certainly has had some time slots that either involved starts early in the morning or late in the evenings in order to continue to meet. The work has still happened but clearly in a very different way.

At one of the executive committee meetings a few years ago there was a proposal to cease the £10,000 expenditure on developing the parliamentarian with disabilities network, which I argued against. At that time, our branch took a unanimous decision to keep the network and investment, which certainly was important, and—if memory serves—our current Presiding Officer was then on the branch executive and took part in that discussion. I had no problem with taking the fight to the executive meeting, because I was the convener of the cross-party group on visual impairment—which I still am—and was also, at that point, the deputy convener of the cross-party group on disability, of which Jeremy Balfour is the convener. Thankfully, the network was continued and has gone from strength to strength, although there is still a lot of work to be done.

Every Parliament and Assembly in our region and across the Commonwealth should have a focus on improving outcomes for every citizen and

should also become more representative of its population. Our Parliament has made progress, but we still have work to do and we can never take anything for granted. The work of the Commonwealth women parliamentarians and the Commonwealth parliamentarians with disabilities network is crucial in the delivery of making positive changes across the Commonwealth. I am genuinely delighted to support them.

The theme for this year's Commonwealth day was "delivering a common future", and the motion explains its aims. I have always had an international outlook in life and I have studied in three European nations as the concept of engaging and working with others is something that is natural for me. Undertaking that in the Commonwealth is absolutely no different to that. The more that people can engage, the better we can understand each other and also our cultural differences. Being a member of the Commonwealth certainly helps in that regard. Crucially, working on shared goals is one way that certainly can bring people and Parliaments together. Clearly, the key shared goal now is tackling climate change. Our actions have an impact on others and we play a leading role in that regard. However, once again, we cannot rest on our laurels—we must always strive to deliver more.

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association is a force for good. It consists of more than 17,000 parliamentarians, and the more members of Scottish Parliament that are engaged in it the better. That will certainly help the other members of the association understand our Parliament and also what we can bring to the Commonwealth.

17:35

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): I thank Sarah Boyack for securing this debate, and note the all-party support that it has received.

Like you, I am sure, Presiding Officer, I was given lots of advice when I arrived in this place—some of it positive, some of it less so. One of the points of advice that I was given very early on was to get involved in the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association in this Parliament and across the Commonwealth. That was a positive decision for me, as I have learned a great deal in the past six years from colleagues in other parts of the world. If I can give one bit of advice to any member who is not yet engaged in it, I would urge them to do so. We need members' support, and I think that they will also benefit from it. We can learn lots from other countries and jurisdictions, but we can also pass on good practice that we have learned here.

As has been mentioned, last week, I and my two colleagues who have already spoken in this debate spent a couple of days on the Isle of Man, and it was interesting to talk to colleagues about the elected office fund, to which disabled people here in Scotland can apply for help to seek election to this Parliament or to local authorities. I think that we are the only jurisdiction within the Mediterranean branch that has such a fund, but I am pleased that quite a number of people from various Parliaments said that they are going to think about that, which will help people with disabilities at least to stand for election, even if they do not get elected.

In the brief time that I have, I want to reflect on two issues that stood out for me. The first is in regard to how we run ourselves in this Parliament. I think that, too often, we react or do things retrospectively rather than looking ahead to see what kind of needs we have. We are fortunate that this Parliament is accessible to most individuals with most disabilities. It was interesting to talk to people from another jurisdiction that thought about the issue of wheelchair access only after someone with a wheelchair had been elected. That sort of thing can often happen with regard to how we run ourselves and the practices and procedures around how we interact with each other. Perhaps we should, every five years, stop and collectively think about how open we are to all agendas and to people with disability.

The second thing that I found interesting was the reflection on digital technology and the hybrid system that we use in this Parliament. Again, I think that we would all agree that, during the pandemic, that was helpful, particularly for those who found it difficult to come to the city. However, a number of delegates from other Parliaments pointed out there is a danger that, if someone is not in the room, they are not making the decisions. Whatever the reason for someone needing to stay at home more—whether it is because of gender or disability—they can take part in debates and ask questions, but they are not in the room making the decisions. I think that we have to carefully reflect on how we are going to use hybrid technology so that we do not inadvertently exclude people from being here and that we do not get to the stage where people do not come because it is more complicated to get here because of a disability or family reasons. Yes, we need to give people flexibility and choice, but we do not want to exclude them inadvertently from doing taking part.

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): Does Jeremy Balfour agree that the predicament that he describes exactly fits the theme of this Commonwealth Day, as we aim to deliver a common future that is available to everyone irrespective of either their disabilities or gender,

and that it has to be a common future that everyone can participate in equally?

Jeremy Balfour: Absolutely, that is why we need to be a far more representative Parliament across different protected characteristics, and we need to work together on that.

In conclusion, I think that this motion explains where we want to go, and Commonwealth Day gives us an opportunity to reflect not only the past but, more importantly, to look to the future of how we can work together with parliamentarians across the world.

17:39

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I congratulate Sarah Boyack on securing the debate.

I recall my early years at primary school, many decades ago, when school atlases had huge areas denoted in orangey red showing all the countries that then comprised the British empire. Over the years, countries of the empire won their independence. For example, India won its independence in 1947, but it was partitioned, forming Pakistan, with that division resulting in a huge number of conflicts.

There is no doubt that the legacy of the British empire is hard to avoid, and it is with us here and now, as the recent uncomfortable visit of the royal couple to Jamaica demonstrates. Memories remain fresh there of the capture and shipping, in horrific conditions, of slaves, many of whom died to provide cheap and expendable labour for the profitable sugar market.

The merchant city in Glasgow, one of our main cities, has fine buildings that are memorials to the riches of assets that were plundered from the empire and enforced slavery. The merchants of Glasgow traded in slave-grown produce. In effect, they cut out the Africa leg of what was known as the triangular trade, buying slaves in Africa with exported goods, shipping them in horrific conditions to the likes of the West Indies and further enslaving them as forced labour. They went instead directly to the plantations. Plantations were given Scottish names such as Hampden, Montrose and Dumbarton. Many slaves were given the surnames of their masters: Buchanan, Dundas and so on, which are names that people carry to this day. Buchanan Street in Glasgow was named after Andrew Buchanan, a plantation owner from Virginia who was believed to have owned more than 300 slaves.

Why do I say that? Like all empires, the British empire's reach declined as it collapsed from within when nation after nation demanded self-

determination. However, British influence was kept with the formation of the British Commonwealth of Nations with five members; it is now known as the Commonwealth of Nations. This is better. Members have common values and goals, including democracy, human rights, good governance, the rule of law, individual liberty, equality before the law, free trade, multilateralism and world peace. Those are still promoted through multilateral projects and meetings, the most obvious being the Commonwealth games, which are held every four years.

As other members have said, the Commonwealth now has 54 members and is a voluntary association with no legal obligations. All members are of equal status and are linked by their historical use of English and historical ties that I have already mentioned. The Queen is retained as head of the Commonwealth countries but, for most of them, she is not monarch. However, even that is under challenge, not just in Jamaica but, for example, in Canada. It will be interesting to see whether, once Charles succeeds, the final few remaining retain her as a titular monarch.

All is not lost for the Commonwealth, which has had its up and downs, with countries being expelled and allowed back in—South Africa—and others suspended, including Fiji, Nigeria, Pakistan and Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe, of course, is still out of the Commonwealth.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): Does Christine Grahame agree that it is remarkable that, because of the values that she extols in her speech, countries that were never part of the British empire have applied to join the Commonwealth?

Christine Grahame: Absolutely. It is not a precondition that a country was part of the empire. It is a voluntary arrangement.

Our connections with the Commonwealth are also through family and friends. There was a spate of emigration in the 1950s, and I recall working-class neighbours on all sides seeking a better life, ironically. They took advantage of assisted passages and left for Australia, New Zealand and Canada. Like many people, I have Grahame family members in all those countries. Indeed, one of my sons has just emigrated with his family to Nova Scotia. It was not a family fall-out, by the way; it was a friendly departure.

We have inherited and, rightly, must acknowledge the bad and good of the once empire. We must hope that the Commonwealth, in its many and continuing transitions, and with its goals of promoting human rights, equality before the law and so on, continues in one form or another. I fully support the relationships that this

Parliament has with the Commonwealth family of nations, which, like any family, will have its disagreements but has more in common with its aspirations. We must all work together now, particularly as we look at the challenges of poverty, climate change, the rights of women and, of course, Covid.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I gently remind members who wish to speak and who have made an intervention that they will need to press their request-to-speak button again.

17:44

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank Sarah Boyack for securing this evening's members' business debate, which pays tribute to the Commonwealth and keeps it alive in the Scottish Parliament.

Our debate is especially appropriate today, as Her Majesty the Queen celebrates the 70th anniversary of her accession to the throne as head of the state of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the crown dependencies and the British overseas territories and as head of the Commonwealth.

On 14 March, the Commonwealth day theme of delivering a common future came to the fore. The vision is to highlight how the member countries of the Commonwealth family are collectively invoking, connecting and transforming. To achieve common goals, the ambitious boosting of trade, essential promotion of good governance and grasping of the nettle when it comes to climate change are all being actively promoted by the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth day theme works perfectly hand in hand with Her Majesty's simplified jubilee message of hope closer to home to bring families, friends, neighbours and communities closer together. Although the Commonwealth family is incredibly diverse, its members have many common ties and a shared history. The Commonwealth helps to strengthen those bonds, and its member states work together as a global force for good around the world.

The values of the Commonwealth charter, which we share as member states of the Commonwealth, are values that we can all adhere to and share. Human rights, the rule of law and democracy are the fundamental building blocks of a free and tolerant society.

I concur with many of my colleagues today in paying tribute to the work of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. I have regularly been impressed by the collective effort to act as a voice for parliamentary democracy across the Commonwealth nations. That is in addition to the

CPA's endeavours to ensure that we play a more active role in developing member states.

I concur with the CPA's desire to share experiences and best practice in how parliamentary work should take place by effectively and rightly holding governments and administrations to account on behalf of the people who they serve. With my background in local government prior to becoming an MSP, I know only too well the importance of looking for examples of best practice in local authorities, and I feel passionately that the desire for scrutiny must exist at parliamentary and international levels. The enhancement of information and sharing of experiences among members from different legislatures in the Commonwealth can have a profoundly positive impact on parliamentary democracies.

Each day, the work of Commonwealth nations truly enriches our lives and promotes stability in these times of great uncertainty that we face at present. Following this year's Commonwealth day, I am sure that members across the chamber will welcome the massive contributions that the entire Commonwealth and the CPA have achieved over time, especially having heard, in recent days, a clue about how the royal family wants to go forward, when His Royal Highness, Prince William said, "Relationships evolve. Friendship endures."

17:48

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): Like other members, I congratulate Sarah Boyack on her motion. I also congratulate the members of the CPA executive in the Scottish Parliament. I look forward to hearing feedback, even if it is in the context of a hybrid meeting of the Parliament, so that parliamentarians can better understand what is happening.

I thank the members who have spoken already, because they have successfully covered a substantial part of my speech. I know that the Presiding Officer will be glad to hear that, because it means that I can jump to the heart of my speech, which is about the Commonwealth youth programme and, in particular, the Commonwealth secretariat's youth development work.

There are 54 members of the Commonwealth—that is 2.5 billion people, of whom 60 per cent are under 30. The Commonwealth sees its young people as an asset to their country's development, who should be empowered to realise their own and, indeed, their country's potential. Young people have the proven capability to lead change and are a vital and valuable investment, for now and for the future. We know that only too well in Scotland through the Scottish Youth Parliament.

Through the secretariat, the Commonwealth youth programme has developed a number of strategies to assist. It supports the effective participation of young women and men in development processes and promotes engagement with the decision makers, including heads of Government. It showcases and celebrates the achievements of young people in driving democracy and development, and demonstrates their capabilities to inspire others further.

The programme provides technical assistance for national and regional youth policies to create youth development frameworks and guidelines. It advocates for increased investment in youth ministries and programmes. It brings a professionalism to youth work by supporting youth work education and training and setting competency standards that now exist around the world.

Above all, the programme does what we do here in Scotland, and which so many adults say that they do: it celebrates the good practice and advocacy that young people bring to their national and international associations. The secretariat places special emphasis on supporting young people to design and drive youth-led initiatives.

The language is slightly different but the dream, the hope and the promise of our young people for the future is the same around the Commonwealth, and I think that we should celebrate that.

17:51

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): I thank Sarah Boyack for bringing the motion to the chamber this evening, particularly where it refers to the Scottish Parliament continuing

"to share ideas, thoughts, experiences and best practice on how to make parliaments work effectively in holding governments to account on behalf of the people that they serve."

I know that Commonwealth day was on 14 March, but it seems rather fitting that we are holding this debate in the Scottish Parliament today—a day on which we have come together as a country to remember and celebrate the life of Prince Philip, His Royal Highness, the Duke of Edinburgh. Earlier today, it was, I think, quite moving to see the Queen in public for the first time in many months; it was also inspiring to listen to the life achievements of Prince Philip and the record of the 700 charitable organisations to which he dedicated his life.

In this platinum jubilee year, it is appropriate to focus a little on the massive contribution that Her Majesty the Queen and Prince Philip have made to making the Commonwealth what it is today in its ever-evolving state, remembering that, on her 21st

birthday, Princess Elizabeth devoted her life to the Commonwealth. In that famous radio address from Cape Town, she said:

“I declare before you all that my whole life whether it be long or short shall be devoted to your service.”

She has been true to that vow, which she made so long ago. The Queen has indeed demonstrated consistent devotion to her leadership of the Commonwealth over the past 70 years.

There has been a lot of change in the Commonwealth; Christine Grahame covered that well. Rather than just being an extension of the British state, the Commonwealth is now a community of equals that work together to pursue common interests and the common good. We are striving continually to create common values as well. Such transformative change, in my opinion, could not have been achieved without the dedication and diplomatic skills of Her Majesty the Queen and, indeed, the late Duke of Edinburgh.

As the world has become further globalised, Britain’s relationship with our Commonwealth partners has had to change as well. I honestly believe that the Commonwealth is too often undervalued by our political leaders in general. The Queen has consistently and unfailingly grasped and appreciated what the Commonwealth—the family of nations—stands for and its potential for good in the world. In truth, the people of the Commonwealth have always been the focus of her service.

By creating historical, social and cultural ties around the world, one of the greatest benefits of the Commonwealth is that it forces us to escape a Eurocentric perspective on the world. With the enforcement of social distancing and self-isolation over the past couple of years, we have, individually, become more accustomed to coming together through the use of technologies. It is my hope that long after the pandemic has passed—may that come soon—the UK Government, the Scottish Government and the Governments of all Commonwealth nations will work to make those technologies bring our Commonwealth family closer together. I think that that would be entirely feasible.

I have just a minute left, so I conclude with a comment about the Duke of Edinburgh. He made 229 solo visits to 67 Commonwealth countries. That statistic alone shows something of Prince Philip’s personal vocation when it came to the Commonwealth. He had many Commonwealth appointments and many affiliations across the breadth of the Commonwealth.

In 1956, Prince Philip founded the Duke of Edinburgh’s Commonwealth study conferences, bringing together emerging leaders in Commonwealth countries. Driven by a belief that

humanity flourishes when we co-operate and work together, he had a deep commitment to the Commonwealth and a vision of its global importance. Through their personalities and ground-breaking initiatives, the Duke of Edinburgh and Her Majesty the Queen have brought about the Commonwealth that we celebrate today: a worldwide family, not just of nations but of people.

As the world becomes increasingly fractured, we should be looking to build on the work of the Duke of Edinburgh and deepen the relations between the nations and the peoples of the Commonwealth.

17:55

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): I start by thanking all members who have participated in this afternoon’s debate. This year in particular, Commonwealth day was a timely reminder of the importance of friendship and community between nations, and the importance of upholding values that we share and hold dear. I am grateful to Sarah Boyack for lodging the motion.

As members have already noted, Commonwealth day was marked earlier this month with celebrations taking place in Commonwealth nations across the globe. My colleague Keith Brown, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans, was honoured to represent Scotland at the Commonwealth day service at Westminster abbey.

Today, I am particularly appreciative of the Commonwealth’s key role in fostering dialogue and promoting peace and prosperity around the world. I would also like to recognise the important work that the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association is doing to promote good governance, parliamentary oversight and accountability.

As many members have noted, the Commonwealth is a family of nations that have committed to the values that are set out in the Commonwealth charter: values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Those are the same values that underpin the Scottish Government’s international approach to being a good global citizen.

Multilateral organisations, such as the Commonwealth, which gives an equal voice to member states of all sizes, provide the ideal forum for likeminded nations to come together to share ideas and experiences, endeavouring to find shared solutions to shared challenges, and, indeed to deliver a common future. The Scottish Government looks forward to the day when we can engage with multilateral institutions, including

with the Commonwealth and its members, as sovereign equals.

Just last year, though we were not at the negotiating table, the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26—gave us the opportunity to see at first hand the major convening power and unparalleled international prominence that such multinational events carry with them.

COP26 also served to highlight the global inequality that is still all too real. That is why the Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that the developed world realises its commitments to help developing countries reduce emissions, adapt to an already changing climate and address the losses and damages that are already being suffered. Scotland committed to trebling our climate justice fund and put £2 million on the table for loss and damage, showing solidarity with those who are most impacted by climate change. That, of course, echoed the Commonwealth's contribution at COP26, championing and amplifying the voices of members, including climate-vulnerable small states.

I have been pleased to hear about the important work that the Commonwealth women parliamentarians network is doing to enshrine women's full and equal participation in political and parliamentary leadership at all levels. At COP26, the First Minister, in partnership with UN Women, launched the Glasgow women's leadership statement on gender equality and climate change. I hope that women leaders from across the Commonwealth will join those from Tanzania, Bangladesh, New Zealand, Canada and Pakistan in adding their names to the statement.

This year, it is really encouraging that the postponed Commonwealth heads of Government conference will go ahead, hosted by our partner country Rwanda, in the beautiful city of Kigali. This Parliament knows how highly we value our close relationship with partner countries: Malawi, Zambia, Rwanda and Pakistan, all of which are members of the Commonwealth of Nations. International development is a key part of Scotland's global contribution within the international community. It encompasses our core values, historical and contemporary, of fairness and equality. We are, for example, funding 11 projects through the Malawi development programme. Those projects cover the themes of health, education, renewable energy, civic governance and sustainable economic development. With specific regard to the Covid-19 response, in February, we announced a further £1.5 million to support equitable access to Covid-19 vaccines and therapeutics in three African countries. That follows support that we have made available throughout the pandemic, including

funding for UNICEF, to meet specific needs in Malawi, Rwanda and Zambia.

Parliament also knows the fantastic work that our international network is doing, including GlobalScot and Scotland Development International. Across the world, they help us boost ties and further Scotland's economic, cultural and policy visibility, including in Commonwealth members such as Australia, Canada, Singapore and India.

The Scottish Government is committed to promoting international human rights standards in a manner that has practical impact. I would, therefore, like to recognise the important work of the Commonwealth secretariat's human rights unit, which helps Commonwealth countries to establish and strengthen their own national human rights institutions.

Scotland is a proudly inclusive nation, and we continue to work hard to ensure that nobody is denied rights or opportunities because of their sexuality or gender. We understand that ensuring that internationally recognised human rights having a meaningful, everyday effect is a core function of Government, and Scotland stands ready to play its part in assisting others where we have knowledge and good practice to share.

As members will remember, in 2014, Scotland welcomed Commonwealth members from across the world when we successfully hosted the Commonwealth games—our largest-ever multisport and cultural event. As active champions for LGBTI equality, we supported Pride House Glasgow, which was the first ever pride house at any Commonwealth games to receive Government support.

With 2022 marking Her Majesty the Queen's platinum jubilee, a special focus of Commonwealth day celebrations was rightly placed on the role of service in the lives of people and communities across the Commonwealth. Although we might not always agree, members across this chamber are united in our service to our constituents and to the people of Scotland.

I again thank Sarah Boyack for lodging today's motion, which I am pleased to support.

Meeting closed at 18:02.

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

Information on non-endorsed print suppliers
is available here:

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



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba