



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament

**Wednesday 2 November 2022**

**Session 6**



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## Wednesday 2 November 2022

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# Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 2 November 2022

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

## Portfolio Question Time

### Covid-19 Recovery and Parliamentary Business

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** Good afternoon. The first item of business this afternoon is portfolio question time. The first portfolio is Covid-19 recovery and parliamentary business. Any members who—

**Members:** We cannot hear you.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I will try again. Is that any better?

**Members:** No.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That is an inauspicious start to the afternoon.

There we go—you can hear me now. Third time lucky.

For those who are not aware, the first item of business this afternoon is portfolio question time. The first portfolio is Covid-19 recovery and parliamentary business. As ever, any member who wishes to ask a supplementary question should press their request-to-speak button or type “RTS” in the chat function if they are joining us remotely.

We are tight for time across this afternoon, so—as ever—I would appreciate succinct questions and answers whenever possible.

#### Covid Recovery Strategy (Evaluation of Progress)

1. **Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government how it will evaluate the progress made in achieving the intended outcomes of its Covid recovery strategy. (S6O-01476)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):** The Covid recovery strategy sets out three high-level outcomes, which focus on reducing inequalities and supporting people who have been most affected during the pandemic. Those outcomes, which are shared with local government, are also relevant to the Scottish Government’s on-going response to the cost of living crisis. The Scottish Government is working in close partnership with local government, Public Health Scotland and the Improvement Service to

promote the shared outcomes and to consider the experiences of different people and places across Scotland. Together, we are using a range of data sources, including national performance framework indicators, to better understand and evaluate progress towards our shared outcomes.

**Daniel Johnson:** We all know that Covid continues to have an impact on poverty, diagnostic waiting times and pupil attainment, for example. How is that impact being measured? The cabinet secretary alluded to the national performance framework, but I know that colleagues in the Parliament have struggled to secure questions relating to such measures. Does the cabinet secretary believe that tracking and reporting on such measures is part of the Covid recovery brief?

**John Swinney:** I would certainly judge that to be the case, yes. The issues that Mr Johnson raises are all relevant to the post-Covid situation. The recovery measures that we are taking are not just Covid related; for example, they also address the issue of inequality, which Mr Johnson has raised. He has heard me say before that Covid exacerbated inequality, it did not create it.

The framework that we have in place through the national performance framework effectively provides a forum in which to address the issues that Mr Johnson properly raises. For the record, I would be very happy to answer any questions on those matters, should they be selected.

**Daniel Johnson:** That is helpful.

#### Covid Recovery Strategy (Rural and Island Tourism Businesses)

2. **Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how its Covid recovery strategy is supporting rural and island tourism businesses. (S6O-01477)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):** The Government is committed to supporting the recovery of the tourism sector in our rural and island communities. Since the pandemic started, we have delivered packages totalling £258.5 million to support Scottish tourism and hospitality businesses. We established the rural tourism infrastructure fund to support critical projects in rural and island areas. Additionally, we have helped businesses to recover through the tourism recovery programme, which consists of 10 projects that are aimed at assisting and accelerating recovery and providing the foundations for the sustainable recovery of the sector. The new tourism and hospitality industry leadership group that we have established will drive sustainable long-term recovery.

**Alasdair Allan:** I have been contacted by a number of hospitality businesses in my

constituency, which are concerned that they may not survive this winter due to the impact of the cost of living crisis, with produce costs and energy bills both having skyrocketed. Given the devastating impact of that and of earlier events on the hospitality sector, can the cabinet secretary outline what representations the Scottish Government is making to the United Kingdom Government on the lack of adequate support for energy costs for small and medium-sized enterprises that are not on the gas grid?

**John Swinney:** Those issues are being put to the United Kingdom Government regularly by the Scottish Government, and the First Minister indicated those points in her letter to the new Prime Minister on 27 October.

The point that Dr Allan raises about the particular challenges of energy costs for non-grid users is a particular problem that is the subject of active dialogue with the United Kingdom Government, and I assure him that we recognise the importance of that being taken forward.

I would also make the point that the wider inflationary pressures beyond energy costs, in relation to food and supplies, to which Dr Allan has referred, are significant issues, and they have been exacerbated by the decisions that have been taken, which have fuelled inflation. The lack of action on energy costs over the summer has contributed significantly to that experience, too.

### **Covid Recovery (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley)**

3. **Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on how it is working with colleagues in local government, as part of its Covid recovery strategy, to support Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley's recovery from Covid-19. (S6O-01478)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):** The Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities have agreed shared priorities for recovery, focusing on those most affected by the pandemic. The Covid recovery strategy brings together more than 70 actions that will support people across Scotland by increasing the financial security of low-income households, by enhancing the wellbeing of children and young people and by creating good, green jobs and fair work. The strategy also focuses on renewing public services to ensure that they meet the specific needs of people and communities.

East Ayrshire Council and South Ayrshire Council, which cover Elena Whitham's Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley parliamentary constituency, have been allocated an additional

£38.6 million and £34.4 million respectively, through the local government settlement, to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic. Those payments are over and above their regular grant payments, which, in 2022-23, have each increased by more than 10 per cent.

**Elena Whitham:** What impact will the delay to the United Kingdom Government's fiscal statement have on the Scottish Government's ability to plan ahead in terms of the support that it can provide to local government, particularly in the context of the Tory Government's trashing of the UK economy—a failure for which it is now making people pay the price through its new wave of impending austerity cuts, which will slash public services and cut incomes? Does the cabinet secretary agree that independence is the only way to keep Scotland safe from the damaging Tory cuts and long-term economic decline?

**John Swinney:** I fundamentally agree with Elena Whitham's analysis. I make the point that the decisions that were taken in the mini-budget over the summer—about which I will have more to say in the statement that I will make to Parliament this afternoon—have significantly exacerbated the scale of the financial challenge that we, households and businesses are wrestling with, which will be felt acutely in the constituencies that Elena Whitham represents.

The timing of the fiscal statement, which has been delayed from 31 October to 17 November, compresses the available time that the Scottish Government will have in which to consider that information and, as a consequence, formulate the financial settlement for local government that arises. However, I assure Elena Whitham that we will take forward the dialogue with local government that she would expect of us in addressing those issues.

### **Covid Recovery Strategy (Stakeholder Engagement)**

4. **Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its engagement with stakeholders regarding its Covid recovery strategy. (S6O-01479)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):** The Covid recovery strategy was informed by extensive stakeholder engagement, and the Scottish Government continues to work closely with a wide range of partners to ensure a successful recovery. We regularly meet stakeholders, including local government, community planning partners, the third sector and business organisations, to resolve barriers, identify solutions and maintain progress.

Our stakeholder engagement informs the discussions and decisions of the Covid recovery programme board, which I co-chair alongside the president of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, and it allows us to work together towards a shared national vision for recovery, as well as to support local recovery that is informed by local priorities.

**Jamie Greene:** I am pleased that the cabinet secretary mentioned the third sector. We all appreciate the value that charities and volunteers provided during the Covid pandemic. That period completely revolutionised the perception of selfless giving and of helping our fellows in our communities.

That said, in its pre-budget submission, Volunteer Scotland raised substantial concerns about what are likely to be substantial cuts to third sector funding over the next couple of years, notwithstanding the issues that were mentioned by the cabinet secretary. How do we ensure that those much-needed and vital voluntary organisations survive and thrive in our communities, given the good work that they do and the pressure that they take off paid public services?

**John Swinney:** Mr Greene raises a substantial point, and it is one that we need to keep in mind as we work our way through what will be a really difficult budget process this year, which will be compressed into a tight timescale. I will not rehearse all the issues around that, as I will have enough to say about it later.

The point that Mr Greene raises is one that I am anxious, at all times, not to lose sight of, because I am convinced—indeed, I am a strong advocate of this within Government—that the third sector can undertake work that will deliver better outcomes, more than likely for less money, if we can properly support and design that assistance.

This morning, with Mr Gray, the minister who is looking after the Ukrainian refugee programme, I visited a third sector venture in Aberfeldy, in my constituency. The group is called Feldy-Roo—I will leave members to reflect on the name—and is made up of local volunteers who emerged from the Covid programme that delivered vital assistance to families during the Covid pandemic. Those volunteers have created a hub for welcoming and supporting Ukrainian refugees and are now supporting more than 70 individuals in the community. That is working fabulously well, but it is a third sector venture that is achieving huge amounts of work with very small amounts of money. Therefore, I am anxious that we take Mr Greene's point forward substantively during the budget process.

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** The decision to close all but four of Scottish Enterprise's offices, including one in Clydebank, suggests that regional economic development is not a strategic priority for the Scottish Government. There are real and genuine concerns that there is a disjointed approach to business support and economic recovery. Can the cabinet secretary tell me how he will ensure that regional economic development and support for business are not lost as a result of those decisions?

**John Swinney:** I reassure Jackie Baillie that I do not consider that the test or measure by which we deliver effective business support is the arrangements for having offices around the country. There are many changes in the way in which services are now being delivered, with an increasing move towards digital delivery of services and the remote working with which we have all become familiar. If the decisions that have been taken are a means of enabling us to deliver a wider range of business support, we should be prepared to embrace reform.

I will have much more to say about it this afternoon, but the existing financial arrangements will put enormous strain on maintaining the current network of arrangements that we have in place.

Finally, I want to make it clear to Jackie Baillie that the national strategy for economic transformation recognises the absolute centrality of regional economic policy. I welcome the opportunity to put that on the record today and to reassure Jackie Baillie about that, because there is no point in the Government pursuing an economic strategy that works only for some parts of the country. It needs to work for all parts of the country, and that is the focus of the national strategy's regional economic policy approach.

### **Covid Recovery Strategy (High Streets)**

**5. Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what support is available in the context of its Covid recovery strategy to help high streets to recover from the pandemic and ensure that there are no long-term scarring effects. (S6O-01480)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):** We are working with all of Scotland's cities and towns to support their recovery and help to build thriving and sustainable towns and cities of the future.

We maintain a competitive non-domestic rates regime and are delivering the lowest non-domestic rates poundage in the UK for the fourth year in a row, and we are supporting a generous package of non-domestic rates reliefs that is worth £801 million.

That is in addition to the action that we are taking to support our town and city centres, and to help retailers and communities to recover, not least through our £80 million Covid economic recovery fund, the £6 million city centre recovery fund, the £325 million place-based investment programme, our retail strategy and the town centre action plan.

**Douglas Lumsden:** Last week, the Scottish Retail Consortium reported that the recovery in vacancy rates has stalled in Scotland, compared with what is happening in the rest of the United Kingdom. That is evident in my home city of Aberdeen, where the business improvement district company, Aberdeen Inspired, has organised an emergency summit next Wednesday in order to save Union Street. Will the cabinet secretary attend that summit, so that he can hear, at first hand, from the retail and hospitality industries about the issues that they face?

**John Swinney:** It is unlikely that I will be able to attend that event, but I am glad that it is happening and that the business community is drawing together partners to ensure that it can happen. If Mr Lumsden wishes to write to me after the event to let me know the issues that are raised and the points that are identified, I will happily engage on those questions.

In the case of the city of Aberdeen, it is important that individual communities join together the work of local authorities and business improvement districts. Just the other week, I had a discussion with Opportunity North East to identify further steps that we can take to advance much of the good collaboration that is going on on those measures. I will be very happy to address any questions that arise from the summit, if Mr Lumsden draws them to my attention.

**Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP):** In addition to the challenges that are posed by the pandemic and Brexit, businesses on Scottish high streets now face pressures that have been caused by the catastrophic economic policies of the Tory Government at Westminster. With nothing but uncertainty and austerity cuts on the horizon as a consequence, does the Deputy First Minister share my view that the people of Scotland should have the right to decide whether to continue to suffer in a less productive and highly unequal UK economy, or to seize the opportunities that independence gives us?

**John Swinney:** I would very much welcome the opportunity for people in Scotland to decide on the independence question and to exercise a choice about the approach to governance that they wish to see in Scotland. We face extremely difficult challenges ahead, which have been made worse by a combination of Brexit and the United Kingdom Government's decision making, which

has had catastrophic implications for businesses and families.

Mr Kidd's point is a substantial one with which I agree. I would welcome the opportunity for people in Scotland to exercise that choice.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 6 has not been lodged.

### Parliamentary Privilege

**7. Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions ministers have had with the United Kingdom Government regarding making MSPs prescribed persons under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, and extending parliamentary privilege. (S6O-01482)

**The Minister for Just Transition, Employment and Fair Work (Richard Lochhead):** The Scottish Government has no formal role over MSPs or the Scottish Parliament, and the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body therefore led in making a direct request to United Kingdom Government officials on the issue.

The UK Government laid the statutory instrument that adds MSPs to the list of whistleblowing prescribed persons in Westminster on 17 October. When the change comes into force on 15 December, MSPs will have parity with MPs on the matter. The Scottish Parliament will be responsible for providing MSPs with guidance and training on the impact of the legislation.

**Stephen Kerr:** I welcome the minister's response in relation to PIDA, which is an act that I think is long overdue for reform.

Every one of us in the chamber will hear from our constituents, on a regular basis, stories of injustice, people being let down very badly by service providers, mistreatment and worse. The Scottish Parliament must be the place where such issues can be brought up, discussed and addressed, and members of this Parliament should be unafraid of censure or legal challenge. MPs are given legal protections when speaking in the House of Commons. Therefore, will the minister support a move to introduce the same privileges to members of the Scottish Parliament that are enjoyed by MPs in the House of Commons?

**Richard Lochhead:** Although I think that Stephen Kerr makes a number of important points, the Scottish Parliament, rather than the Scottish Government, has now taken action that will, from the perspective of Stephen Kerr and other MSPs, at least improve the situation and give them parity with MPs. In respect of whistleblowing, that means that anyone who wishes to approach an MSP can



do so with their own employment protected, as is the case in relation to MPs in Westminster.

With regard to any other improvements relating to the privileges or otherwise of MSPs that Stephen Kerr would like to see, he might wish to raise them with the Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament.

### **Covid-19 Booster Vaccination Programme**

**8. Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what role the autumn/winter Covid-19 booster vaccination programme will play in its Covid recovery strategy. (S6O-01483)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):** The winter vaccination programme will play a vital role in protecting people at the highest risk from severe illness and hospitalisation this winter. That will help to ease the potential additional pressures that Covid-19 and flu put on the national health service and social care services over the winter months.

Although uptake of the vaccines has exceeded our expectations, we are continually exploring ways to increase the vaccination rate. In line with our commitments in our Covid recovery strategy, we have embedded inclusivity as a key aspect of the vaccination programme from its outset, and we are working alongside health boards and other partners to encourage uptake, remove barriers and respond to evidence of low uptake in certain communities, including people from more deprived areas.

The winter vaccination programme began on 5 September, starting with front-line health and social care workers, and residents and staff in care homes for older adults. Appointments for those aged 65 and over began on 19 September. Those aged 50 to 64 with no additional risk factors have been able to book an appointment online since 24 October. Appointments for those aged five to 64 in a clinical risk group also began in the week commencing 24 October.

**Stuart McMillan:** Does the cabinet secretary agree that it is vital that as many people as possible take up the offer of both Covid and flu vaccinations? That is one way that they can help to protect themselves, their family and the wider community, and take pressure off front-line health services.

**John Swinney:** Yes, I do. The Covid vaccination programme has been an unbridled success. It has given assurance to the population, and it has given protection to our vital public services, which would have been overwhelmed without it. It has also enabled many of us, but not all of us—some of our fellow citizens still face real

challenges because of their own wider health factors—to return to something that is closer to normality in our lives. The programme has delivered welcome progress in that regard.

I take this opportunity to encourage everyone in the eligible groups to take up vaccination.

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I echo everything that the Deputy First Minister has said about the importance of taking up the booster vaccination. I booked my booster for next week. Perhaps I will see him when I attend.

However, there seems to be anecdotal evidence that some individuals are reluctant to come forward for a booster. Perhaps that is because they think that the pandemic is over. Does the Scottish Government have any data as yet on take-up figures for the booster? If not, when are we likely to get that data? What more can the Government do to target groups, including certain ethnic minorities, that have historically been reluctant to come forward to get vaccinated?

**John Swinney:** I am glad to hear that Mr Fraser has booked his appointment; so have I. I was going to be rather impertinent and suggest that I would have thought that he would have been in an earlier group to me, age-wise. Clearly, it would be inappropriate for me to even infer that.

Take up has been very encouraging; it has exceeded our expectations to date. I have numbers in front of me, so I presume that I can use them. Among older adults in care homes, uptake is 85 per cent, and in the age 65 and over age group 74.2 per cent have been vaccinated already—and we are not through the programme yet.

We are very encouraged by the progress that has been made so far. However, having said that, I note Mr Fraser's legitimate point. We must use every opportunity to encourage people to take up vaccination and not to be deterred by some of the stuff that swirls around. Vaccination offers essential protection not only for individuals but for our public services, because it is a way of reducing the demand that might otherwise present itself.

I assure Mr Fraser and Parliament that the Government is tailoring its messages to ensure that we reach—as I mentioned in my earlier answer to Mr McMillan—the groups in which, from our evidence and experience, take up can be low. We are taking steps to improve that through our communications.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I can confirm that I, too, have booked my appointment. I assume that that is because NHS Orkney is working through the age groups more quickly than other health boards are. *[Laughter.]*

**Stephen Kerr:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. When asking my question, I failed to point members to my entry in the register of members' interests as a director of WhistleblowersUK. It is important that I put that on the record.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Kerr. That is, indeed, on the record.

## Finance and Economy

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The next portfolio is finance and the economy. I encourage members who wish to ask a question to press their request-to-speak button or, if they are joining us remotely, to place "RTS" in the chat function during the relevant question.

### Cost of Living (United Kingdom Government Support)

1. **Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what its latest engagement has been with the United Kingdom Government regarding the funding available to support people with the increased cost of living. (S6O-01484)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):** I had an initial meeting with the new Chief Secretary to the Treasury last week, and I have sent a number of letters to the UK Government to request urgent action to address the cost of living crisis, given that the powers to properly support people and businesses are currently reserved. The First Minister also wrote to the Prime Minister last week to call for urgent action that meets the scale of the challenge, including additional funding for devolved Governments to support our people, provide fair public sector pay uplifts, and protect our public services.

**Stephanie Callaghan:** Households on low incomes desperately need stability and certainty as they try to afford the essentials, pay their rent, and keep food on the table. Will the Scottish Government call on the UK Government to extend its cost of living support with new support packages that target the households that are most impacted by the increased cost of living, as we have done in Scotland, and demand the uprating of benefits in line with inflation?

**John Swinney:** We have made those calls to the United Kingdom Government. We recognised the importance of increasing social security benefits in line with inflation in April and, if we were able to see the bringing in of a permanent £25 uplift to universal credit, for example, that would make a huge difference to the circumstances of low-income households.

The Government in Scotland is, of course, taking steps in the public sector pay deals that we are putting in place to ensure that those with the lowest incomes receive the highest percentage increases. All those measures are designed to support people practically.

I assure Stephanie Callaghan that the Scottish Government is using every opportunity to engage with our United Kingdom Government counterparts to advance those important issues.

### Disabled People (Employment Rate)

2. **Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what progress has been made regarding increasing the employment rate for disabled people. (S6O-01485)

**The Minister for Just Transition, Employment and Fair Work (Richard Lochhead):** The latest figures from the Office for National Statistics annual population survey show that the employment rate for disabled people in 2021 was estimated to be 49.6 per cent. That is an increase from 42.8 per cent in 2016, which was our baseline year for halving the disability employment gap. That indicates that we have made significant progress towards meeting our first interim target to increase the employment rate of disabled people to 50 per cent by 2023.

**Emma Roddick:** The progress that the minister has outlined is very welcome. Can he confirm that the Scottish Government is on track to meeting its overall targets in increasing the employment rate for disabled people?

**Richard Lochhead:** In the Scottish Government's 2018 publication "A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People: Employment Action Plan", we identified the interim milestone that the employment rate for disabled people will increase to 50 per cent by 2023, as I have said, and that it will rise to 60 per cent by 2030. I confirm that it is our understanding that we are currently on track to meet those targets. The Scottish Government also made an overarching commitment to ensuring that the disability employment gap is reduced by at least half of its 2016 level by 2038. We are making good progress in Scotland, but there is, of course, still a lot to do.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Jeremy Balfour has a supplementary question.

**Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con):** Can the minister shed a little light on why Scotland lags behind England in terms of disability employment? The latest figures that I have, which are from 2021, show that the average English employment gap is 27 per cent and that the gap is as low as 22.4 per cent in the south-east of England,

whereas the gap in Scotland is 32.8 per cent. Why is there that difference?

**Richard Lochhead:** I would be happy to look at the regional figures for England and to try to delve a bit further into why there might be any differential. It is encouraging that we are making progress in Scotland on closing the disability employment gap, and I hope that the measures that we are taking are making a difference. Of course, many stakeholders and organisations are supporting that, as well. There are a number of different indicators. Some show that Scotland is ahead of the rest of the United Kingdom. Jeremy Balfour has highlighted some regional disparity perhaps. I would be happy to look into that further and perhaps to drop Jeremy Balfour a note.

### Employability (Budget Reduction)

**3. Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide details of the £53 million reduction in the employability budget announced by the Deputy First Minister in September 2022. (S6O-01486)

**The Minister for Just Transition, Employment and Fair Work (Richard Lochhead):** The £53 million was to support additional employability activity in 2022-23. Of course, the decision not to issue that funding was not taken lightly but, at a time of acute labour shortages, historically low unemployment and soaring inflation, the Scottish ministers have been clear on the need to prioritise money in people's pockets now over additional spending on employability, which is unlikely to result in immediate benefits for individuals. However, we have maintained our existing investment in employability this year, with more than £59 million being made available through the no one left behind approach, and £23.5 million available through fair start Scotland in 2022-23.

**Finlay Carson:** Any cuts to the employability budget could impact on essential apprenticeship places right across Scotland. Presently, there are almost 1,000 apprenticeships in Dumfries and Galloway with employers such as Jas P Wilson and DuPont Teijin Films. Those apprentice places provide an excellent pathway for young people to develop their skills and give them a great start in their career, but they also provide vital skills that are needed in my constituency. Will the minister give a commitment to protecting apprenticeships so that young people in my constituency and across Scotland will continue to have such opportunities?

**Richard Lochhead:** I am happy to give Finlay Carson the assurance that he asks for. However, I point out that the employability budget is a different matter. It comes under our limited powers

in relation to employment, through which we can support people who are very far from the labour market to come into it. That is what we are speaking about when we talk about employability budgets.

I make the obvious point to Finlay Carson that, if he is concerned about the budgets that are available to the Scottish Government and the Parliament, he should be making representations to the United Kingdom Government, and he might wish to offer his support to the Deputy First Minister when he delivers his budget statement in a short while.

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** The notable thing about the employability cut is that the employability line was the only line within the skills and training budget that was actually going up. That underlines the need to focus on the area. What is being done to improve the accessibility to disabled people of apprenticeships and other skills measures?

**Richard Lochhead:** I reiterate that we retain our employability budget and that what was cut was the planned increase. Clearly, we took that decision against a very difficult backdrop. I dealt with Daniel Johnson's point about apprenticeships in responding to Finlay Carson's question, and I dealt with the point about disabled people in answering the previous question. This specific question is about the employability budget. We still have that budget, but the substantial increase that we planned was cancelled due to the pressures on Scotland's overall budget.

### Prestwick Airport (South Ayrshire Economy)

**4. Siobhian Brown (Ayr) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it can provide an update on Prestwick airport's contribution to the South Ayrshire economy. (S6O-01487)

**The Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth (Tom Arthur):** Prestwick airport continues to grow steadily, making a positive contribution to the local and regional economy and supporting 300 direct jobs as well as many more in the local economy. The airport is working with the councils in the area to play its part in attracting inward investment through projects that are connected with aviation. The management and board have a clear strategy to deliver growth, and the airport continues to strengthen its position as a niche airport with a reputation for being innovative and flexible in meeting customers' needs.

**Siobhian Brown:** Prestwick was one of the few airports in the world to make a profit during the pandemic, and it has played a major part in cargo distribution across the United Kingdom. With the Brexit chaos and the backlog of cargo at

Heathrow, it was actually quicker to send cargo to Prestwick and then down to London than it was to get it out of Heathrow. Prestwick airport is also an integral part of the aerospace industry, which currently supports more than 4,000 jobs locally. Does the minister agree that the continual Conservative criticism in the chamber of Prestwick airport is bizarre?

**Tom Arthur:** I agree with Siobhian Brown that it is important for all of us to consider the language that we use in the chamber and to make sure that, when we make critical points, we do not do so in a way that talks down or undermines confidence in any sector of our economy.

Prestwick has clearly had significant challenges, but the recent performance of the business is promising and welcome. Significant progress has been made in winning a bigger share of the fixed-based operations market, property around the campus has very high occupancy rates and, as well as continuing passenger operations, the airport is focused on growing its dedicated cargo operations, for which it has a strong reputation. As the home to approximately half of Scotland's aerospace sector, Prestwick is playing a key role in the Ayrshire growth deal and helping to unlock significant inward investment, thereby creating high-value jobs and potential supply chain opportunities in South Ayrshire. All of us, including all the Opposition parties, can surely be proud of that progress.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I apologise for not advising members earlier that there is a grouping for this portfolio. Question 5 is grouped with question 8, so I will take any supplementary questions after question 8.

### **Economy (Engagement with United Kingdom Government)**

**5. Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what recent engagement it has had with the United Kingdom Government on matters impacting the Scottish economy. (S6O-01488)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):** Over the past few weeks, I have had discussions with a number of Chief Secretaries to the Treasury—I had a discussion with the new one just last week. I also had extensive discussions with the previous Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities on investment zones. I have made clear the impact of the current economic crisis on people across Scotland and our economy, including the increased pressures on the Scottish budget and the vital public services that we support.

**Audrey Nicoll:** Aberdeen and the rest of the north-east have made significant contributions to UK Government coffers through the energy sector. In return, the north-east of Scotland has been gifted Brexit—with Aberdeen being the worst-hit UK city, at a cost of £9,000 per person—turmoil in the housing market, and sky-high energy bills, which have damaged families and forced small businesses to close. Does the Deputy First Minister agree that it is time for the UK Government to stop treating the north-east as a cash cow and that Rishi Sunak must get a grip on the economy, which his party has ruined?

**John Swinney:** Audrey Nicoll raises serious economic issues that are affecting the north-east of Scotland. The principal issue that she raised was Brexit and its implications on the supply of labour and on companies' ability to trade effectively with markets with which they were very familiar up until the implementation of the Brexit deal. That difficulty has been added to by turmoil in the housing market, which has been severely damaged by the effects of the mini-budget, and the wider consequences that Audrey Nicoll highlighted. She has raised significant issues that are having a negative effect on the north-east of Scotland's economy.

The Scottish Government is keen to support the north-east through the matching funding that we have provided for the Aberdeen city region deal and the £75 million that we have provided for the energy transition fund. We have also committed to the £500 million just transition fund.

We recognise the significant challenges that the north-east of Scotland's economy faces. We must make a transition to net zero, and that must be done in a just fashion, so the Scottish Government is determined to work with the north-east and interested local authorities and parties to advance that agenda. However, the prevailing economic conditions are very challenging because of Brexit and the prevailing economic mood that has arisen from UK Government decisions.

### **Chancellor of the Exchequer (Meetings)**

**8. The Deputy Presiding Officer:** To ask the Scottish Government when it last met with the Chancellor of the Exchequer. (S6O-01491)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):** I have not had a meeting with the current chancellor, but I have corresponded with chancellors on a number of occasions, as has Kate Forbes, the substantive finance secretary. I point out that a number of letters from Kate Forbes, the Welsh finance minister and the Northern Irish finance minister were not replied to by United Kingdom chancellors for a significant number of months. Given that we get lectured in

this Parliament about engagement with the UK Government, I point out that some of our correspondence quite simply does not get answered. I have had an apology for that fact and, I am glad to say, a reply to my most recent letter from the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. It is difficult for us to advance dialogue when there is nobody at the other end to engage on such questions.

**Annabelle Ewing:** It is very disappointing to note that the latest UK chancellor, by not finding the time to speak with the Deputy First Minister and acting finance cabinet secretary directly, appears to have as little regard for Scotland and our elected Government as his predecessors did. As for the lack of response to correspondence, there is no excuse for that. What on earth happened to the respect agenda?

What options, if any, would be open to the Deputy First Minister, in the context of the devolved settlement, to protect the people of Scotland from further UK Tory Government austerity cuts, for which people in my Cowdenbeath constituency and across Scotland did not vote?

**John Swinney:** Annabelle Ewing puts her case powerfully, as I would expect. The constituents she represents in Cowdenbeath will be significantly affected in a negative way by a further programme of austerity and, in her case load, Annabelle Ewing will be dealing with the consequences of the last round of austerity from the UK Government.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury has promised me dialogue in advance of the statement on 17 November. I will obviously commit myself to that at any occasion, in the hope of influencing the agenda in order to avoid a further round of austerity, which would be damaging for Ms Ewing's constituents and members of the public around the country.

I point out that there was no interaction with the Scottish Government before the mini-budget in late September. There was absolutely no dialogue—indeed, not even the courtesy of an advance phone call—which is a breach of the normal protocols of dialogue. The current Chief Secretary to the Treasury has assured me that the normal protocols of interaction have been restored, and I will hold him to that, because it is vital that the Scottish Government and the Welsh Government—my colleagues in Wales and Northern Ireland are just as livid about this as I am—that we are properly engaged with to ensure that we can put forward the concerns and the views of members of Parliament and, in particular, of constituents such as those of Ms Ewing, which she has put to me today.

**Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab):** The Deputy First Minister has mentioned his engagement with the UK Government, but I was disappointed to learn recently that there has been minimal engagement from Scottish ministers on the development and refresh of the UK national shipbuilding strategy. Will the Deputy First Minister please commit to having the Scottish Government engage fully with that strategy, given that we are the second biggest purchaser of vessels in the public sector, after the Ministry of Defence? We need to get this right, because when vessels are awarded to Turkey, it is a failure for the Scottish industry.

**John Swinney:** I am happy to commit to dialogue on any aspect of strategy that affects the industrial base of Scotland or any other question affecting Scotland. I respectfully point out to Mr Sweeney that there has not been a functioning UK Government for the best part of 12 months. The UK Government has literally not functioned: interaction has been appalling; dialogue has been one way; no decision making has come back from the UK Government, and what decision making it has undertaken, such as in the mini-budget, was, as Mr Sweeney and I will agree, catastrophic.

I hope that we have some degree of functioning government in the UK Government to allow us to advance the legitimate issue that Mr Sweeney has put to me this afternoon.

### Hospitality Sector (Support)

**6. Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what support it is providing to businesses in the hospitality sector, in light of the recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and the cost of living crisis. (S6O-01489)

**The Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth (Tom Arthur):** The hospitality sector is vital to Scotland's economy. We provided more than £4.7 billion in support to businesses during the pandemic, including across the tourism and hospitality sector, and we are closely monitoring impacts of the cost crisis. We are also establishing a tourism and hospitality industry leadership group to drive sustainable long-term recovery.

We maintain competitive non-domestic rates, delivering the lowest non-domestic rates poundage in the United Kingdom for the fourth consecutive year, supporting a package of non-domestic rates reliefs worth £801 million.

In light of increased pressures and limited powers, we will continue to press the United Kingdom Government for support.

**Fulton MacGregor:** During the October recess, I was invited to meet a number of pub owners in

Coatbridge Main Street, who expressed real concern about the viability of their businesses in the short term, due to the cost of living crisis, rising energy costs and changes in behaviour following the pandemic. One of those is the Eden group, which employs nearly 100 people in my constituency and was in *The National* this weekend—the minister might have seen that. It called on the chancellor to immediately cut VAT, offer rates assistance and provide some form of recovery funding. Does the minister agree with those calls on the UK Government and will he lend his voice to them?

14:45

**Tom Arthur:** We understand that businesses such as the Eden Group, which operates in Fulton MacGregor's constituency, continue to face significant challenges, including as a result of the longer-term impact of the pandemic and the cost crisis. We do not underestimate the scale of those challenges. That is why my colleague the Deputy First Minister wrote to Jeremy Hunt, the new chancellor, on 19 October to re-emphasise the need for targeted support for households and businesses, funded by windfall gains in the energy sector, and to seek clarity on the support that will be available from April 2023.

We will continue to work with businesses in Scotland to press the UK Government for a range of measures—including recovery support and measures on VAT—to help to ease the pressures.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Douglas Lumsden has a brief supplementary question.

**Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con):** The Audit Scotland report "Scotland's financial response to Covid-19", which was published this year, stated that 100 per cent of the £4.5 billion of Barnett consequentials relating to business support was allocated. However, how much of that £4.5 billion was allocated to funds but not spent? Is that money now available to help businesses that are struggling now?

**Tom Arthur:** We have committed all Covid consequentials for business support that we received during the pandemic to support businesses. I missed some of the detail of the member's questions, but I am happy to consult the *Official Report* and to get back to him in writing if I missed anything.

### Small Businesses (Support)

7. **Foyso Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what support it is providing to small businesses through the cost of living crisis. (S6O-01490)

**The Minister for Just Transition, Employment and Fair Work (Richard Lochhead):** We understand the challenges that are facing small businesses, which have been exacerbated by the economic upheaval caused by the United Kingdom Government in recent weeks. We have in place an existing package of non-domestic rates reliefs worth over £800 million, which includes the UK's most generous small business bonus scheme. However, the powers and resources that are required to tackle this crisis lie with the UK Government. We will continue to press it to do everything possible to help Scotland's small businesses.

**Foyso Choudhury:** I thank the minister for that answer, and I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests. I have been contacted by business owners in the Lothian region, particularly those with restaurant businesses who have been operating for decades but now find themselves having to close for good thanks to the perfect storm of Covid, a staffing crisis and, now, the cost of living crisis. As that is happening across multiple sectors, does the Scottish Government share my fear that we might have preserved our economy through the worst of the Covid pandemic, only to see it hollowed out by the latest crisis?

**Richard Lochhead:** I assure Foyso Choudhury that we absolutely share his fears and concerns about the impact of the cost of living crisis and rising energy bills on small businesses in Lothian and throughout Scotland.

Foyso Choudhury and I, along with others in the chamber, were at the Asian restaurant awards dinner last night, where we not only enjoyed fantastic curry and good company but heard from numerous small businesses in the hospitality and catering sector, including restaurants, about the enormous challenges that they face as a result of rocketing energy bills, bills for ingredients and other costs. The situation is very serious.

Of course, as recently as 27 October, the First Minister wrote to the new Prime Minister to stress the urgent need for clarity on what support will remain available for non-domestic consumers beyond April. We have committed to working with the business sector to explore how businesses can be supported with their energy costs, within our devolved powers. We are supporting Business Energy Scotland, and businesses should contact Business Energy Scotland for advice. We will do everything else that is within our powers to help.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Bill Kidd has a brief supplementary question.

**Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP):** Many small businesses in Scotland face substantial pressures, as has been said. Can the minister

provide any update on the Scottish Government's latest engagement with the UK Government regarding the support that is available to small businesses to deal with those rising costs?

**Richard Lochhead:** Bill Kidd makes a powerful and valid point. I reiterate that the First Minister has just written to the new Prime Minister about those issues, and we await a—we hope positive—response. I have no doubt that the Deputy First Minister will address some of those issues in his forthcoming statement.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes portfolio questions.

## Emergency Budget Review

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

14:49

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):** Scotland is facing a cost of living crisis. A combination of the impacts of Brexit, the aftermath of the pandemic and the energy crisis that has been fuelled by Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine has sent prices spiralling. Inflation is at a 40-year high, and the pressure on the finances of households and businesses is acute. Public services are facing demands—entirely legitimate demands—to make significantly enhanced pay offers to their staff.

As a Government, we have a duty to respond, but our ability to respond is limited by the inactivity of the United Kingdom Government and the financial restrictions of devolution. The budget of the Scottish Government is largely fixed. We have no ability to borrow to increase our day-to-day spending, our reserve funding is fully utilised and our income tax powers do not allow changes to be made during the financial year.

In August, we announced that we would undertake an emergency budget review to identify every possible penny to support the people of Scotland through the cost of living crisis, while maintaining a pathway to balancing the budget. On 7 September, I set out to Parliament the first of the hard prioritisation choices that had already been made and, today, I provide a further update on our progress through the emergency budget review process.

Since September, the crisis has deepened further. The inactivity of the UK Government gave way to calamity. The UK Government's mini-budget sent shock waves through the markets, driving up borrowing costs for Government, businesses and households. So disastrous was the package of unfunded and uncosted tax cuts for the rich that not only did the mini-budget not survive the month, but neither did its architects—the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Prime Minister.

That utterly needless upheaval has created significant damage for individuals and great uncertainty for Scotland's finances. Initially, the Scottish Government was told that we would receive an additional £660 million through the block grant adjustment. Now, with the new

chancellor scrapping the plan to cut the basic rate of income tax in the rest of the UK, our funding will be reduced by £230 million over the period of the UK spending review. That represents a swing of almost £900 million in the space of less than a month. Now, under a new Prime Minister and a new chancellor, calamity is giving way to austerity, with deep spending cuts expected.

As members will be aware, I had intended to present the outcome of the emergency budget review to Parliament last week, but I paused that announcement while we awaited the fiscal statement of 31 October. However, that date has now been changed to 17 November. Although I would have preferred to see the Office for Budget Responsibility forecasts and the outcome of the UK statement prior to publishing the review, I have concluded that we can wait no longer. The scale of the challenge is so severe, and the impacts and uncertainties for people, households and businesses so significant, that the imperative consideration must be to provide as much stability, certainty and transparency as possible.

We now also, once again, face the prospect of tax changes from the UK Government. It is only right that we take the appropriate time and care to consider any impacts on our budget and devolved tax policies, so I will wait until after the UK Government's next fiscal statement before deciding on the content of any tax discussion paper.

I cannot overstate the degree of challenge associated with undertaking this emergency budget review. I have said before that, in all my experience now and during my previous tenure as finance secretary, there has never been a time of greater pressure on the public finances.

Inflation means that, today, our annual budget is worth £1.7 billion less than it was worth when it was published last December. At the same time, demand for Government support and intervention is, understandably, increasing. I must balance the books, but I am committed to doing so in a way that prioritises funding to help families, to back business, to provide fair pay awards and to protect the delivery of public services. This emergency budget review delivers on those objectives.

The Scottish Government is determined to enhance pay and target support at the lowest paid, where possible, as a crucial part of our response to the cost of living crisis. That support includes offers in the region of 7 per cent for front-line workers in the local government non-teacher and national health service agenda for change workforces, which would increase salaries for the lowest-paid staff in agenda for change by more than 11 per cent.

Although some pay negotiations have still to conclude, I have already committed more than £700 million of additional resources to fund enhanced pay settlements. I am grateful for the efforts of employers and trade unions in facilitating those vital collective bargaining processes, but—and I make this absolutely clear—every additional penny for pay has had to be found from existing, previously agreed allocations elsewhere in the current finite Scottish budget. We have reached the limit of what can be done in terms of reprioritisation.

When I set out the initial package of £560 million of savings for 2022-23, I was clear that additional savings would be required. Today, I have published an emergency budget review that sets out a further £615 million in savings, including £400 million from reprioritisation of spend within health and social care to provide a fair pay offer for NHS staff and to meet the extraordinary pressures of inflation and demand as the service begins to recover from the pandemic. That has included rephasing some social care spending in line with expected spending profiles and repurposing spend in other areas such as mental health.

Despite that, we continue to progress our work to deliver a national care service as well as commitments to fair work and adult social care, and we continue to provide overall increases in mental health spending as well as the delivery of dementia, learning disability and autism services and cross-cutting trauma work. Those are extraordinarily difficult choices that no Government wishes to have to make, but the full balance of health and social care reprioritisation will remain within the portfolio. A further £33 million of resource savings and £180 million of capital reductions have also been made, including reducing our marketing expenditure to below pre-Covid levels.

Taken together, those decisions and those already set out in September total almost £1.2 billion. They are not decisions that we would wish to make, but in the absence of additional funding from the UK Government, they are decisions that we are compelled to make. They ensure a path to a balanced budget, while prioritising fair public sector pay offers and recognising that that is critical to the delivery of key public services.

This Government will always do what we can to support those most affected by the cost of living crisis. I can confirm that we have identified and allocated the resources required to double the value of the December Scottish child payment bridging payment, benefiting around 145,000 school-age children who are registered to receive free school meals; to double the fuel insecurity fund to £20 million; to increase funding to local



authorities for additional discretionary housing payment support to mitigate the UK Government's benefit cap as fully as possible within our devolved powers; to introduce a new £1.4 million island cost crisis emergency fund; to introduce new payment break options to help protect those who have taken control of debt through the highly successful debt arrangement scheme; and to implement reforms to remove cost burdens for the most financially vulnerable.

In our efforts to support business, we have looked closely at regulation and how we can make it easier for businesses to thrive, and we have used today's review to set out a range of improvements. After extensive engagement with business organisations, industry groups and individual businesses, including industry summits on energy and financial services, we will introduce a range of measures that are set out in the emergency budget review. They include building on the additional £300,000 provided to Business Energy Scotland this year by doubling the energy efficiency cashback element of the loan and cashback scheme to £20,000; protecting the small business bonus scheme, which is the most generous scheme in the UK and takes more than 111,000 business out of rates altogether; and establishing a joint task force with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, local authorities, our regulatory agencies and business to consider the differing impacts of regulation on business.

Alongside our counterparts in Wales and Northern Ireland, we have repeatedly called on the UK Government to do more, given the considerably greater flexibility available to it. The First Minister reiterated those calls to the latest Prime Minister, highlighting the essential need to provide further targeted financial support to low-income households, to urgently provide clarity on what support will remain available for both non-domestic consumers and households following the early end to the energy price guarantee next March and to make additional funding available so that devolved Governments can support people, provide fair public sector pay uplifts and protect public services.

The First Minister has also reiterated our deep concern about the risk of social security benefits not being increased with inflation in April. A permanent £25 uplift to universal credit should be introduced now, alongside the reversal of the two-child limit for universal credit and tax credits and the abolition of the benefit cap. We have been clear that an enhanced windfall tax should fund that support in place of increased borrowing or spending cuts.

We are now anticipating a package of eye-watering cuts and tax rises in the autumn statement. It will be evident to all members that

the emergency budget review has involved extremely difficult decisions. Even when such decisions need to be made quickly, as is the case now, it is essential that we use the best available evidence and be as transparent as possible.

To that end, I thank the members of our expert panel for the consideration and advice that they have provided over recent weeks, and which I publish today. The panel has assessed the outlook that faces the Scottish Government in its budget and advises the Government to proceed with caution to achieve its objectives in these difficult days.

In addition, I have published a new analytical report on the impact of the cost of living crisis in Scotland alongside a high-level summary of the evidence on the equality and fairness impacts of the emergency budget review measures. The outlook for 2023-24 and beyond is clearly even more difficult than it was when we set out the resource spending review earlier this year, and measures of efficiency and reform in the delivery of our public services will be even more important.

Nonetheless, I assure Parliament that this Government remains firmly committed to and focused on continuing to support our public service recovery from the impacts of Covid, on tackling and reducing child poverty, on taking forward our net zero ambitions and on supporting strong and sustainable growth in our country.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The Deputy First Minister will now take questions on the issues raised in his statement. We have slightly overrun, but I still intend to allow around 20 minutes for questions, after which we will need to move to the next item of business. I encourage members and, indeed, the cabinet secretary to be as succinct as possible in their questions and answers. Those who wish to ask a question should press their request-to-speak buttons now, if they have not already done so.

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I thank the cabinet secretary for prior sight of his statement, and I also acknowledge the difficult circumstances in which the Scottish Government finds itself. Some of them are obviously international and some have been domestic, and I fully acknowledge that part of the difficulty is the timing of the forecasts and the budget. Those are substantial difficulties for the cabinet secretary, and I fully understand why he cannot say a bit more about tax policy just now.

The cabinet secretary is always challenging the Opposition parties to come up with budget suggestions of their own—and rightly so. Here is one. Indeed, the cabinet secretary refers to it himself at the bottom of page 2 of his statement, where he talks about health and social care. Does

he really think that now is the appropriate time for his Government to be proceeding with a national care service bill that has drawn so much criticism from virtually every stakeholder and which Audit Scotland predicts will cost £1.3 billion?

Secondly, the cabinet secretary has also outlined further cuts to health, education and justice. Why have no further cuts been made to the constitution budget?

Thirdly, the cabinet secretary has also outlined some measures that he has agreed with business—I think that they are on page 3 of his statement. Will he tell us what specific measures will be put in place to boost productivity, which, as he confirmed at the Finance and Public Administration Committee, is a serious issue that undermines the tax take in Scotland?

**John Swinney:** I think that what Liz Smith was trying to get out at the beginning of her contribution was an acknowledgement of the difficulties created for me not just by the timing decisions but by the decisions of the United Kingdom Government. Allow me to complete that sentence for her.

In relation to the national care service, we have a very high level of delayed discharge in our hospital system, and it is putting enormous strain on the delivery of the national health service. We have to recognise and acknowledge the necessity of reform, because the current arrangements are not working. Therefore, we have had to take steps to establish a national care service for two reasons: first, to ensure that members of the public in all parts of the country are assured about the quality and range of care that will be available to them, and, secondly, to ensure that we are able to support the sustainability of the national health service. That is why that expenditure is required.

As for the question about the constitution budget, I suspect that that was code for Government's commitment to spending £20 million on a referendum on independence. I point out to Liz Smith that that expenditure does not arise in the current financial year, and it is the current financial year that I am wrestling with to the greatest extent.

Lastly, in relation to productivity, I have announced a set of savings that are being made, but at the same time, I am protecting very significant levels of public expenditure on skills, universities and the college sector to ensure that we can invest in developing the capability of individuals in our society to maximise their economic contribution.

The biggest single thing that would help with productivity in this country is having a sensible approach to population growth and migration, but that has been abruptly halted for us by the total

folly of Brexit. If I could appeal to Liz Smith and the Conservatives about anything—

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Humza Yousaf):** Social care.

**John Swinney:** The health secretary mentions social care. The social care sector has lost thousands of employees because of Brexit. We need to have a sensible discussion about migration, because the behaviour of the Conservative Government, and especially of the Home Secretary in recent days, is directly undermining productivity in the Scottish economy.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I encourage the cabinet secretary to ignore sedentary interventions from members of his party or from members of Opposition parties.

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** Where there are additional measures on the cost of living in the statement, I welcome them. There is no doubt that the chaos that is emanating from the UK Government makes a challenging situation much more difficult, but in turn, that underlines the need for clarity and transparency from both the Scottish and UK Governments.

Proportionately, which portfolios have the largest savings to make against the budget that was passed earlier this year in order to achieve the £1.175 billion-worth of cuts that were announced? As confirmed by the Scottish Fiscal Commission in paragraph 34 of its May forecast, the Scottish Government had planned to carry forward £279 million from this year's budget to next, and £250 million to 2024-25 using the reserve. Is that still the case, and if not, how have those sums been allocated, and what are the impacts on next year's budget and the budget in the following years?

I am sure that the cabinet secretary agrees that we must all tighten our belts, but I note that the Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture has travelled to eight countries in as many months, clocking up almost 22,000 air miles. What cost control measures are being applied to the expenditure of members of the Government and civil servants?

**John Swinney:** The steps that the Government takes on clarity and transparency are evident from the fact that I am here today and that I appeared before the Finance and Public Administration Committee several weeks ago in an evidence session on the subject, which was chaired by Mr Johnson. I also appeared in Parliament in early September to explain openly the changes and the choices that I was making, so on the question of transparency, this Government is delivering on what would be expected by the public.

I have not approached the matter from the perspective of applying a random reduction across portfolios. I have had to look, at this very advanced stage of the financial year, at what options remain available to me to reprioritise spending. There is more scope to do that in some areas of Government activity than in others. In the case of the changes in relation to health and social care, I was absolutely clear with the health secretary that whatever savings we were able to identify would be retained in that portfolio to support the very strong pay offer that has been made, particularly for low-income staff.

In relation to the reserve, we have carried forward the resources from the last financial year into this year that we had planned to carry forward. Obviously the budget for next year was predicated, in the resource spending review, on a carryover from this year into next. I have yet to identify those resources. That remains an on-going challenge to meet before the end of the financial year, and I am still working to ensure that I can balance the budget this year, which is my statutory duty.

On the question about the Government's international engagement, we cannot be insular and have to be in contact with the rest of the world. I am quite sure that it is important that we maintain dialogue. The Prime Minister was criticised only yesterday for not going to the 27th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—I am delighted that he is now going. International dialogue is essential for every Government, including the Scottish Government.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I encourage members to listen to not only the questions but the answers.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** Make no mistake, we are here in large part because of the calamitous decisions by the Conservative Government. It has added hundreds of pounds to people's mortgages, and that is unforgivable, which is why we need a general election.

However, the choices that the Scottish Government has made are manifestly wrong as well. Irrespective of when the £20 million is allocated for, we are still spending civil service time and money on the production of constitutional papers, £17 million on national testing every year and up to £1 billion on the ministerial takeover of social care, and all the while councils are being squeezed to the pips, long Covid sufferers continue to struggle and £38 million is being stripped from the mental health budget. On that last point, I ask the Deputy First Minister this: what has changed in the severity of the national mental health crisis that he can find that amount of money to cut from the mental health budget?

**John Swinney:** Let me address two points that Mr Cole-Hamilton made. Local authorities will get significantly more resources, as a consequence of the reprioritisation exercises that I have gone through, to support very strong pay deals that are assisting local government employees on low incomes. I am sure that Mr Cole-Hamilton welcomes that.

I acknowledge the significance of the question on mental health. Indeed, in my dialogue with the health secretary we have both been determined to ensure that we protect mental health services as much as we possibly can. What has been announced today will mean that the resources allocated to mental health are not increasing as fast as we had planned; they will still grow, but not as fast as we had hoped. I am not going to minimise the significance of that decision, but it came about because I have limited options at this stage in the financial year and it is an indication of the severity of the situation that we face in public expenditure that I have had to take decisions of that type. As I said in my statement, I would prefer not to take that decision, but I have to fulfil my duty to balance our resources in this financial year and to ensure that I can support employees—particularly those on low incomes—in dealing with the cost of living crisis that they all face.

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** Does the Deputy First Minister agree that the emergency budget review is stark about the difficulties caused by inflation eroding the Scottish budget, the limited fiscal powers of the Parliament and the refusal of the UK Tory Government to either increase the resources available to Scottish ministers or devolve the powers that are necessary to deliver for the people and communities of Scotland in these challenging times? Also, can he advise of his engagement with business and trade unions throughout the emergency budget review process?

**John Swinney:** We have taken forward a number of discussions with business and trade unions. I have held round-table discussions with businesses and I met a range of trade unions to hear their views and perspectives on those questions, which have informed the conclusions that we have come to.

Mr Gibson made a key observation about the limited scope that I have to take a different course of action, because the budget for each financial year is largely fixed unless the UK Government changes its position—obviously, I have made the case to the UK Government to recognise the unprecedented effect of inflation in this financial year. There has been no financial year under devolution in which we have come anywhere close to the inflationary pressures that we face now, and

that merits an intervention, which I have asked the UK Government to undertake.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We have eight further members wishing to ask questions in the remaining seven and a half minutes, so we will have to speed up both the questions and the answers, Deputy First Minister.

**Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con):** The Scottish Government has received specific Barnett consequentialia this financial year for things such as the UK Government's housing support fund. However, the Scottish Government has not always been transparent on how that money has been spent. Will the Deputy First Minister commit to publishing information on how the Scottish Government has spent all consequential funding that it has received throughout this financial year?

**John Swinney:** How consequential funding works is that the UK Government takes its decisions, the money is transferred to the Scottish Government and we publish our budget plans in extraordinary detail, with the autumn budget revision and the spring budget revision, to give a complete picture during the financial year. Mr Arthur will be going to committee shortly, once the autumn budget review is published, to explain its contents, and I have come to Parliament with two additional substantive financial statements—in early September and today—transparently setting out what the Government is doing with all the resources that are available to us.

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** Can the Deputy First Minister confirm that this statement is based on the assumption that Westminster will not either increase or decrease our block grant in the current year, 2022-23? If it was to do that on 17 November, what would happen?

**John Swinney:** This statement is predicated on our receiving neither an increase nor a decrease in the funds that we expect to receive from the United Kingdom Government. That risk is not just apparent on 17 November; it extends to the moment at which the United Kingdom Government undertakes its supplementary estimates, the date of which I am not yet certain.

There is risk involved in all of that. There could be an upside; equally, however, there could be a downside. I have to take decisions to properly set out the budget choices that the Scottish Government is making. At times, I have to do that without the complete picture of information that would ordinarily be available to me.

**Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab):** I note the Deputy First Minister's comments regarding the potential impact of the imminent UK fiscal statement on our devolved tax policies and his

intention to wait until we hear that statement before considering further discussion on tax, but I wish to push him ever so slightly on this point. There are a number of underutilised devolved tax options that we should be fully considering, which could generate revenue to invest in the areas that have been outlined today, which are stretched so thin. Will the Deputy First Minister commit in principle to a comprehensive review of devolved tax policy within the gift of the Scottish Parliament, following the UK Government's fiscal statement?

**John Swinney:** I have to do that, because I have to set tax rates on an annual basis, so that will be undertaken. If there are particular propositions that Mr Sweeney would like me to consider, I would be very happy to receive them in writing, or I could meet him and hear the points that he would like to put to me.

**Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP):** The cabinet secretary is faced with two aspects of risk that are of particular concern. First, there is the uncertainty created by chaotic UK Government economic policies. Secondly, there is the undoubted harm that is about to be inflicted on the average citizen come the autumn statement from the Chancellor of the Exchequer. That the chancellor has taken advice from George Osborne, the architect of austerity, is no comfort on either front. Can the cabinet secretary indicate the basis of discussions with the latest UK chancellor? Indeed, has he been consulted by him at all?

**John Swinney:** I have had an initial discussion with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on the approach to the statement on 17 November. That did not in any shape or form cover substantive details. I have been promised substantive engagement before the UK statement, and I will make myself available for any such dialogue at any opportunity.

**Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green):** Further to that answer, what response has the cabinet secretary received from the UK Government to the Scottish Government's specific request that the financial settlement for the current year be inflation proofed?

**John Swinney:** I have not yet had a positive response to that, despite the fact that we have asked for that on a number of occasions. Kate Forbes asked for that issue to be addressed in the summer, before she went on maternity leave, and I reiterated that. The First Minister has also made that point, and I will continue to stress it. As I said in an earlier answer, this is a year quite without precedent regarding the scale of inflationary pressures. Ordinarily, if inflation is at 2 or 3 per cent, that will not really cause much of a financial strain. However, if inflation is at 10 per cent, that will cause a real financial strain. This morning, the

Criminal Justice Committee heard evidence from the chief executive of the Scottish Prison Service about the issues that that public service is wrestling with.

The point that Mr Greer makes to me and which I will take to the UK Government is an entirely valid view.

**Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP):** With the key levers to address the cost of living crisis in the hands of the UK Government, the Scottish Government is severely constrained in terms of the funding that is available to it to take action to support people in Scotland, including my constituents. Clearly, that shows the deficiencies of the current fiscal framework. Does the Deputy First Minister agree that, with the full suite of powers that are available to an independent country, this Parliament would have been able to mitigate and deal more fully with the cost of living crisis?

**John Swinney:** Clearly, there are constraints on what we are able to do, because our budget is largely fixed, due to the nature of the arrangements that we face. Mr McMillan makes the fair and reasonable point that there is a range of other powers and responsibilities that could be used to provide us with much greater flexibility in the challenges that we face.

**Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** The Deputy First Minister has announced spending reprioritisation worth £400 million across the health and social care portfolio. That includes cuts to mental health and primary care spending. Has the Scottish Government carried out an analysis of the impact of those cuts on those receiving mental health treatment or primary care services, and can the cabinet secretary say where exactly that money is to be taken from?

**John Swinney:** As I explained in my answer to Alex Cole-Hamilton, the issues will vary in different budget lines. In relation to mental health, the budget will not be increasing as fast as we wanted it to. In relation to some of the work around primary care, we will ask for reserve funding that is held by health and social care partners to be used as an early priority rather than it being retained while further strain is carried by public funds.

I point out to Mr Stewart that we are having to do that because of the severe financial pressure that is being applied to us due to the UK Government's mismanagement of the public finances and the economy, with inflation having been allowed to rage rampant across our society.

Those are the hard choices that we have to address as we deliver on the expectations of members of the public. In relation to the impact on members of the public, we have published an

equality impact assessment that addresses many of the issues that Mr Stewart raises.

**Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP):** The rising cost of living is having a substantial impact on families across Scotland and, so far, the UK Government has failed to provide any certainty to families on low incomes. Does the Deputy First Minister agree that the UK Government should give a clear commitment in its upcoming fiscal statement that social security benefits should be increased in line with inflation?

**John Swinney:** I think that that would help members of the public who are facing acute challenges. Obviously, we have taken decisions to boost the support that is available to families facing financial hardship, and I encourage the UK Government to do likewise.

## National Care Service

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-06523, in the name of Craig Hoy, on national care service viability. I ask members who wish to participate to press their request-to-speak buttons now or as soon as possible.

I encourage members who are leaving to do so as quickly and quietly as possible.

15:23

**Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con):** This Scottish National Party Government is setting out on the most radical reform of Scottish public services in the history of devolution, but ministers cannot deny that they have been warned about the risks around the establishment of a national care service. The Government has been warned by its own MSPs, Michelle Thomson and Kenneth Gibson; by charities, about the risks to continuity of care; by Audit Scotland, about the financial risks; by integration joint boards, about the risks to care across the country; by councils, about the risks to local democratic accountability; by care home providers, about the impact on the independent and third sectors; by rural councils, which warn of the risks of creating a central belt-focused service; by health and social care partnerships, about the risks of proceeding with a framework bill when we know so little detail of the scope of the service; by alcohol and drug charities, about the impact on services for those with dependency issues; by unions, about the risks to workforce planning and development; by labour groups, about the risks to pay and conditions; by social workers, about the impact of detaching social work from local services such as housing and employability; by council chief executives, about the risks of shifting 75,000 council workers to a bloated bureaucracy; by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, about the risk of a grab on Holyrood's powers of appointment; and by the legal profession, about the risks of losing cohesive responsibility for the care provided in complex cases. It has even been warned about the legality of pushing through sweeping changes in a framework bill and delegated legislation.

Despite those repeated warnings, the SNP Government continues to sail towards the iceberg. Humza Yousaf is still, apparently, supremely confident that he can captain the national care service, despite sinking Scotland's national health service. Under the SNP, our NHS and social care systems are in crisis, so it is all the more reckless for this Government to embark on wholesale structural reform when urgent action is needed at the front line.

The minister is ignoring warnings about the crisis that he faces today. He simply dismisses criticisms of that reckless and unaffordable legislation. He ignores the present funding crisis in local government and social care. He dismisses concerns from a workforce that is underpaid, worn down and burned out. He overlooks the acute lack of staff and provision in care at home. He sets aside the skills and workforce crisis in residential social care and ignores the crisis in drug and alcohol services. Instead of taking concrete steps to properly fund social care at the local level, the SNP wants to embark on a massive restructuring, which will divert the millions that are needed to invest in staffing away from the front line and into the pockets of civil servants and administrators.

Why can the minister not see that social care organisations and unions are terrified about that misguided plan? Those bodies include the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, Unison, Community Integrated Care, NHS Lothian, Scottish Care, Parkinson's UK, Highland Council, East Lothian IJB, the City of Edinburgh Council, Angus health and social care partnership, the MS Society and the Faculty of Advocates—the list goes on.

The SNP's members have raised their heads above the parapet to express concerns about how the Government will fund its national care service. After destroying councils' finances, it is looking to do the same to social care. Audit Scotland is warning that the already eye-watering predicted costs of £1.3 billion are likely to be an underestimate. Even after the framework bill has been published, big questions remain. How is a top-down system consistent with the Christie commission's view that services must be designed "with and for people"? How will the system eradicate the postcode lottery in care? How will commissioning and collective bargaining work coherently and consistently on a national basis? How will care boards be comprised? Where will the democratic accountability be? What impact will that massive shift have on local authority budgets? If efficiencies are gained in the economy of scale that is achieved through the NCS, will they not be wiped out by the equivalent loss in economies of scale within local government? Where are the calculations on the cost savings that an NCS will achieve? The financial memorandum is very vague. What impact will the NCS have on capital investment in social care today? Councils are pulling back. Is it not the case that that power grab is likely to be an asset grab as well?

The nationalists have learned nothing from the shambolic centralisation of Police Scotland—a move that left the police service plagued by financial problems, a lack of accountability and cuts at the front line. The NHS is in crisis. The SNP has pushed our police service to the brink

and is now determined to go the same way with social care.

**Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** The member mentioned the NHS, and I note that his party voted against the creation of the NHS 22 times. Does he not recognise that people with lived experience fed into these proposals and are asking us to create the new public service?

**Craig Hoy:** The Conservative Party might not have given birth to the NHS, but Conservative Government after Conservative Government has nurtured it through good times and bad. That is why, today, in our motion, the Scottish Conservatives call on the SNP to scrap these wasteful plans and put every penny back into front-line social care.

We want to see a local care service that empowers communities. We want a change in culture and a change in delivery at the local level, with a service that is underpinned by a simple commitment to ensure that people access care in their local area, close to their family and close to their support networks. Centralisation poses risks not only to those who work in the care system, but to those who need care and the families that need to be around them.

The national care service poses a very real risk of an increase in cruel, out-of-area care that splits families from loved ones. The SNP falls back on one justification alone—that the reforms will create consistency—despite having no real plan to achieve it.

The only thing that is consistent about a national care service is the opposition to it. There is opposition from councillors, NHS boards, the unions and the workforce, charities, royal colleges and the independent and third sector. There is now opposition from normally supine SNP back benchers. However, there is a way out—the iceberg can be avoided. The SNP can urgently U-turn on a national care service and back our commonsense, local care-driven approach. Unless it does so, once again, overstretched care workers, vulnerable patients and their families will suffer.

I urge colleagues across the Scottish Parliament to support quality local care and to back our motion tonight.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the significant cross-party and cross-sectoral concern about the monumental risks involved in the creation of a National Care Service; warns that the financial memorandum to the Bill estimates that the creation of the service could cost up to £1.3 billion over five years and questions the accuracy of the Scottish Government's estimates currently before the Parliament; raises concern about the rationale for creating a National Care Service through major structural reform at a time when social care is in crisis; acknowledges the

considerable concerns from local government, trades unions and other industry stakeholders about the potential negative impacts of centralisation; believes that better value for money and better patient care will be achieved by directing investment into frontline provision and staffing rather than reorganisation, and calls for the creation of a Local Care Service focussed on better local delivery, underpinned by a local care guarantee.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I remind members that we are extremely tight for time and that they will need to accommodate any interventions in their time allocation.

15:21

**The Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care (Kevin Stewart):** The bill sets out our clear principles for the future of a national care service, and it is against those principles that the bill should be scrutinised, the detail designed and the benefit monitored. We are not just suggesting change to address the challenges of today; we must build a public service that is fit for tomorrow.

Today, in Scotland, at least 232,000 people— one in 25—receive care support. Demand will only grow, and we need to recognise the risk of increased pressure on an already fragile system by acting now.

Our ambition for the national care service is to establish a social care system that not just enables people to survive, but empowers them to thrive. Health and care support is an investment, and it must work to remove barriers and tackle inequalities. The principles of any new system should be person centred, with human rights at the very heart. That means that the NCS must be delivered in a way that respects, protects and fulfils the human rights of people who access health and care support.

Another fundamental principle is inclusion. This morning, I visited Tiphereth, a Camphill community that is based in Edinburgh, to learn more about its work in supporting the life and work of adults with learning disabilities and autism. We must get it right for everyone. We have an opportunity to include many people across society in a conversation about their needs—a conversation that, traditionally, they have been excluded from.

I thank carers, both paid and unpaid, for their remarkable work to provide critical and invaluable support to people across our country. The cost of living crisis is having an impact on everyone in Scotland, including the social care workforce and unpaid carers. By working in collaboration with our partners, we want to see improvements in recruitment and retention, fair work and ethical commissioning.

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)**  
rose—

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) rose—**

**Kevin Stewart:** I do not really have time, but I will take Ms Smith's intervention.

**Liz Smith:** I will be quick. The minister has spelled out laudable aims, but why are so many stakeholders opposed to the bill?

**Kevin Stewart:** There are stakeholders who are not content with all aspects of it, but I point out to members that it is about people, and, in the consultation, people backed the national care service overwhelmingly. It is about people—that is who we need to listen to. We, as a Government, are fully committed to improving the experience of the social care workforce and increasing its levels of pay, as we recognise and value the work that those staff do.

The Government is taking action. From April, we provided funding of £200 million to local government to support investment in health and social care, to embed improved pay and conditions and to deliver a £10.50 an hour minimum wage for all adult social care staff in commissioned services from 1 April.

**Jackie Baillie rose—**

**Kevin Stewart:** The Scottish Government has been leading the way in the United Kingdom to improve pay and terms and conditions. I am shortly due to chair an event with COSLA, unions and providers to discuss how we will work together to make further improvements now. Government alone cannot do that, but we can make significant improvements by working with all our partners.

The principle of financial sustainability is set out in the bill. We must ensure that we can deliver continuity and security of service for those who access services.

**Jackie Baillie:** Will the minister take an intervention on that point?

**Kevin Stewart:** The Government has already committed itself to increasing spending in social care by 25 per cent by the end of this session of Parliament, to lay the groundwork for the establishment of a national care service. Through plans for an ethical commissioning framework, we will ensure that there is increased financial transparency, allowing us to prioritise quality of care and to understand better cost and profit across the mixed economy of providers.

**Jackie Baillie:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Kevin Stewart:** I have a lot to get through, so I will not take Ms Baillie's intervention.

We must reintroduce a focus on early intervention and prevention. We must limit the number of people who end up in crisis. People

want and need quality services that are delivered at a time and by a method that best suits their needs and that builds on their strengths.

Last week, I met representatives from the Fife social work team and heard about its social work off the books initiative, which delivers in the Pathhead and Dysart areas of Kirkcaldy. That community approach aims to reduce crisis care. It is critical that we learn from existing good practice from across the country.

The National Care Service (Scotland) Bill sets out a framework for change. The detail relies on us all, including those of us here in the chamber today as well as those outwith it, working together.

We need to grasp the opportunity to deliver public service improvement together, to ensure that we are getting the detail right for everyone. Such an approach requires trust and confidence in each other and in the process. We need to recognise the implementation gaps between legislation and delivery that the independent review highlighted.

I have been honoured to chair the social covenant steering group over the past 12 months. It will be critical in holding us to account for maintaining the priority of the voices of lived experience in the design phase.

People confirmed to us that they are supportive of the proposals in last year's consultation. The sooner we start, the sooner we can deliver better care support for everyone.

I move amendment S6M-06523.3, to leave out from "notes" to end and insert:

"that the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic highlights the imperative for the National Care Service (NCS) to end the postcode lottery in the provision of adult social care; believes that there must be a rights-based, user-led approach to social care with consistent and fair access to high-quality care and support; further believes that the NCS should embed ethical commissioning that promotes fair work and climate change ambitions; recognises that the key consideration is how improvements are made for people who rely on the services of the NCS; welcomes that the NCS will be shaped by co-design and that services will be delivered locally; supports the creation, in line with the recommendation of the Independent Review of Adult Social Care, of a system of national collective bargaining on pay, terms and conditions within the social care sector and for workforce representatives, such as trade unions, to be involved in the governance of the service, including through full membership of Local Care Boards; notes that, in establishing the NCS, including any transfer of financial resources from local authorities to reformed integration boards, the Scottish Government should take into consideration the impact on local authorities' ability to resource and deliver other services; understands that the UK Government's mismanagement of the economy has heaped more pressure on care providers who were already adversely affected by the consequences of Brexit, and recognises the importance of local authorities, health boards, and the Scottish Government working constructively together to deliver improvements to



social care in the interim, while mitigating the impact of the UK Government's actions."

15:38

**Paul O’Kane (West Scotland) (Lab):** More than a decade ago, the Scottish Labour Party called for the creation of a national care service. Our vision was rooted in a belief that social care could be transformed to deliver exceptional national standards of care across Scotland. That is about changing the culture, not the structures, by ensuring that our social care system treats people with dignity and by ensuring that our care staff are respected as skilled professionals. Sadly, the Scottish Government’s proposal lacks substance, lacks vision and, increasingly, lacks the confidence of key stakeholders, including trade unions, COSLA, care providers and staff who are working on the front line.

At yesterday’s Health, Social Care and Sport Committee, COSLA’s health and social care spokesperson, Councillor Paul Kelly, clearly outlined on behalf of councils across Scotland—of all political stripes, including SNP-led councils—huge concerns about what the bill would do to local government. It would take away power from local communities and place it in the hands of ministers, who would then use secondary legislation to design the national care service. He raised concerns that many councils might become unviable.

I and the Scottish Labour Party have serious concerns about the Scottish Government’s vision of the national care service. If the minister will not listen to me, perhaps he will listen to his own colleagues, who are also losing confidence in their Government’s ability to deliver what it has promised.

At last week’s Finance and Public Administration Committee, Kenny Gibson compared the Government’s approach as being akin to using a

"sledgehammer to crack a nut."—[*Official Report, Finance and Public Administration Committee, 25 October 2022; c 24.*]

He also mentioned the “monumental risk” in relation to the financial memorandum and the lack of detail therein.

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Paul O’Kane:** I have a lot to get through, so I want to make some progress.

The loss of confidence in this proposal has been growing, week on week. That is why, today, Scottish Labour is calling for the bill for to be paused. Let me be clear: this is not about trying to get one over on the minister or opposing for the

sake of opposing. What we are debating is far too important for that. This is about a fundamental principle—the principle of good lawmaking—and creating a national care service that is worthy of the name.

It is irresponsible to press ahead with legislation that is not fit for purpose and that does not command the confidence of key stakeholders. We cannot afford to get these reforms wrong. Indeed, we have had 15 years of this Government ignoring social care. Half-baked solutions will only deepen the problems in the sector.

Presiding Officer, if Emma Harper wants to speak, I am happy to give way.

**Emma Harper:** Fantastic. I thank the member for taking an intervention. I just want to ask Paul O’Kane, as a member of the Health and Sport Committee—which I am as well—whether he would concede that we are just two sessions into the scrutiny of the bill and that there is time to submit changes and to take evidence. Everybody is dumping on this right now, as though there is a massive issue with it. Do we not need to take the time to scrutinise it and allow all the voices to come out?

**Paul O’Kane:** What I recognise is that the Government has been talking about this and consulting on it for months. I recognise that the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, in its evidence, said that it found out about the Government’s framework legislation proposals on the night before they were published. I do not think that that is acceptable, and I think that there are growing calls from across all sectors to take a pause and reflect.

I say again to the minister that, if he will not learn from me and does not want to listen to me, perhaps he should learn from John Swinney. In 2018, the Deputy First Minister listened, reflected and took the sensible decision to pause the Education (Scotland) Bill when he recognised that stakeholders had serious concerns about the move to legislation. The process that flowed from that was co-designed with councils, teachers, parents and staff, and it is the reason that we have the improvement collaboratives that we recognise today.

**Kevin Stewart:** Will Mr O’Kane give way?

**Paul O’Kane:** I am running short of time, as I am into my final minute. I am sure that the minister will be able to raise his point in his concluding remarks.

The Scottish Government needs to go back to the beginning of this process to substantively and meaningfully engage with the key stakeholders in co-designing legislation. In the meantime, let us get to work on improving social care right now. As

a first step, the Scottish Government should immediately act on the key recommendations of the Feeley report, including by removing non-residential care charges and tackling poverty pay in the social care sector. It is clear that we do not need to wait for a national care service to begin to address these problems. Indeed, we have been making that argument from the Labour Party benches for many months. The Government could take action here and now to improve the social care sector if it had the political will to do so.

What the Scottish Government is proposing is, in its current form, a national care service in name only. The Scottish Labour Party aspires to see a properly funded and well-planned national care service. That means local delivery while maximising standards, making it a race to the top by forcing bad actors who do not deliver high levels of service out of the system. The Scottish Government must listen and reflect on the growing worry of stakeholders, including trade unions, front-line staff and local authorities, and it must show some humility. It is time for the Government to pause and to meaningfully listen and properly engage, so that we can create the national care service that Scotland deserves.

I move amendment S6M-06523.2, in the name of Jackie Baillie, as an amendment to motion S6M-06523, in the name of Craig Hoy, to leave out from “raises concern” to end and insert:

“; recognises that Scottish Labour first proposed a National Care Service over a decade ago with the aim of improving national standards for social care, while also supporting local delivery and accountability; regrets that, instead, the Scottish Ministers have published a bill that is completely lacking in a vision for a National Care Service; acknowledges the serious concerns from local government, trades unions and other stakeholders about the potential negative impacts of centralisation; considers that meaningful reform should focus on changing culture and not structures, so that care users are treated with dignity and staff are valued as skilled professionals; believes that the immediate priority must be to address the current challenges in social care, and calls on the Scottish Government to pause the bill and take stock, and urgently deliver on the recommendations in the Feeley Review, including ending non-residential care charges, and to tackle poverty pay in the sector, in the midst of the cost of living crisis.”

15:43

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** I am pleased to rise for the Scottish Liberal Democrats, and I am grateful to Craig Hoy for securing the debate.

Words matter. What we call things matters. In the nomenclature around the national care service, the Government has sought to dress it up as our most treasured national possession. It is small wonder, then, that the public response has been to regard it as a mirror image of that thing

that they, and we all, hold so close, but it is anything but that. The NHS was forged out of the rubble and poverty of war. It is free at the point of delivery. Nothing of that is emulated in the proposed national care service. The Liberal Democrats have made no secret of our opposition to the plans from the very start.

The SNP-Green Government has stood and watched the disintegration of our health and social care sector—this is on their watch. Instead of taking the immediate action that is so desperately needed across the sector, it has responded with an ill-fated, bureaucratic exercise, which is already turning into a mess.

Even I am surprised at how quickly the wheels have come off the wagon. Already, legal experts, auditors and council officials have slammed Government plans. This week, the chief executive of East Ayrshire Council said that local authority leaders

“have no certainty ... on what services are going to look like in the next three to four years”,

and he described the current circumstances as “truly unstable” for social work and social care.

As we have already heard, at this week’s Finance and Public Administration Committee meeting, officials described uncertainty about how much the plans would cost, and there was a suggestion that the cost could spiral beyond the Government’s estimate of £1.3 billion.

The alarm has even been raised from within the SNP’s ranks—we have heard something of that this afternoon—in a rare act of dissent among the collective, although that is becoming a little more common these days.

**Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP):** I want to put it on the record, as somebody who raised some of those points, that I am absolutely in favour of the national care service. It is the kind of audacious and ambitious project that we should be doing. However, I am carrying out my function of financial scrutiny, and other parties, such as the Tories, would do well to heed that.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** I can only imagine that Michelle Thomson’s mobile phone must have been red hot between the time that she made her remark that she had “no confidence whatever” and the intervention that she has just made. However, she said that and she said that she was completely surprised by the lack of detail in her Government’s financial memorandum. Sadly, it does not come as much of a surprise to the rest of us.

Many of us have rightly questioned the wisdom of spending huge amounts of money on structural reorganisation rather than supporting hard-working staff.

**Kevin Stewart:** Will the member give way?

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** I am afraid that I must make progress, as I have only four minutes.

We must remember that, despite the incredibly important service that social care staff provide, they are among the lowest paid in our society. As a result, the cost of living crisis is hitting them the hardest and more must be done to help them. If we do not do that, they will leave the sector and seek fairer pay, and who could blame them?

No one is arguing that change and reform are not required. Of course they are needed, but we must have good change and genuine reform. Staff and service users need that change now, not in five years' time when this bureaucratic monolith is finally set up. Were Liberal Democrats in government in Scotland right now, we would reward staff with better pay, better conditions, career progression and powerful national collective bargaining. We would set out national standards to get rid of the postcode lottery that currently exists in social care so that everyone had the same level and quality of care no matter where they live. Instead, the Government wants to remove power from local service providers, who know best how to use it, and place it in the hands of Government ministers, who have proven themselves to be incompetent time and again.

The playwright George Bernard Shaw once said:

"Progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything."

The Government would do well to heed that lesson before things get worse. The Government's plans could not have been more poorly thought out, so I urge it to think again before it is too late.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to the open debate.

15:47

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Last week, Jackie Baillie said that she has a long memory when it comes to parliamentary experience. Although I cannot compete with her on longevity, I can get quite close, and I certainly remember a couple of occasions when there were serious concerns about financial memoranda that were designed to underpin major pieces of proposed legislation. That happened with the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill and with college regionalisation. However, never in my time in the Scottish Parliament have I seen a financial memorandum that is so out of kilter with the ambitions of a bill and so lacking in detail.

Michelle Thomson and Kenny Gibson were spot on last week, and Michelle Thomson is spot on again this afternoon, in saying that they have a

duty of scrutiny—they do. They said that it is not possible to have confidence in the financial memorandum and that it is a "monumental risk" to taxpayers. That is not a good place for the Scottish Government or the Parliament to be in. When it comes to scrutiny of the bill, the financial memorandum certainly does not adhere to the request from Audit Scotland to ensure that we have more accurate financial memoranda accompanying proposed legislation.

**Michelle Thomson:** In fairness, will Liz Smith concede that the larger and more audacious and ambitious a project is, the more difficult it is to achieve accuracy at the point in time when the financial memorandum is produced? I know that from my business experience of delivering large-scale transformational programmes.

**Liz Smith:** During my time in the Parliament, which now stretches to 16 years, I have never seen a financial memorandum that is so lacking in that regard. As Audit Scotland points out, a number of costs associated with the bill are yet to be assessed, including those relating to national care boards, transition costs, pensions, VAT and capital investment and maintenance costs. Those costs are surely extremely important and are of considerable concern to stakeholders.

The Fraser of Allander Institute has suggested that groups that tried to estimate the costs had to persistently question civil servants to find out the additional costs—those beyond the core costs that are mentioned in the financial memorandum. Virtually every stakeholder is asking those key questions, and I would have thought that that would be of considerable concern to the Scottish Government. I suggest that it is entirely the wrong way round to have a situation in which it is not possible to scrutinise enough of the bill. That is why COSLA, councils, trade unions and front-line staff in the public and private sectors are getting angry. They simply do not have the answers that they need.

Let me turn to the evidence that Ralph Roberts presented on behalf of NHS chief executives. He rightly cited the Scottish Government's very welcome focus on improving social care, on developing better quality and consistency when it comes to data and on ensuring that some of the intense workforce pressures on the NHS are addressed. However, when he was asked about the extent of the restructuring, which is on a scale that is equivalent to major reforms such as the centralisation of the police force and college regionalisation, he was much more sceptical. He said that what is proposed by the Scottish Government is not supported by NHS chief executives at this time, when they are having to deal with other pressures and when all spare capacity is already being taken up. Mr Roberts

suggested that we should consider other ways of tackling the issues at stake before this leviathan new structure is even contemplated, given that so many costs are unaccounted for.

People are asking whether the bill is necessary to deliver the desired ambitions, not just because of the current economic challenges but because of the extensive disruption that is likely to take place through structural change.

I have every support for the motion in the name of Craig Hoy.

15:52

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** Here we go again with these Opposition debates, with members talking down the SNP Scottish Government's commitments and, indeed, our hard-working NHS and social care staff. Such debates in this chamber are becoming wholly tiresome. Last week, it was Labour and, this week, it is the Tories. It is becoming increasingly harder to see the policy differences between the two better together parties as they come back together and make a massive muckle midden together in the lead-up to our indyref. Mibbes that is just what is going on.

Anyway, to dispel the drivel in the Tory motion, I note that the establishment of a national care service will be the most ambitious reform of public services since the creation of the national health service. The national care service, as proposed in the bill, will bring together social work, social care and community health to strengthen health and social care integration for adult services.

**Liz Smith:** I accept the situation that the member has outlined, but does she really think that, given what stakeholders are saying, they are comfortable with the bill? Every one of them who has given evidence to the Finance and Public Administration Committee and spoken to us has said that they are not.

**Emma Harper:** I know that at the heart of the bill is the idea of caring for human beings and looking after people whose verbal responses to the consultation indicated that they want a more joined-up service that brings all the care providers together.

By the end of the parliamentary session, accountability for adult social work and care support will transfer from the Government to ministers, who will be accountable.

**Craig Hoy:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Emma Harper:** I am sorry, but I dinnae have time. These wee four-minute speeches do not allow us to get on the record everything that we

want to say, but I am happy to speak to any member after the debate if they seek a more detailed response.

The bill will increase transparency and standardise delivery of care to eradicate the current postcode lottery care system. Importantly, it will take the focus of social care away from today's for-profit industry and will lead to a system that focuses on human rights and high-quality care.

Contrary to what the Tory motion states, the bill does not centralise social care. It is a framework bill, which means that other regulations will come after it—affirmative regulations that we will, again, be able to scrutinise. That means that it allows—

**Paul O'Kane rose—**

**Emma Harper:** I am sorry; I want to proceed, because I have particular points to make.

For example, regarding how the approach will work better, Dumfries and Galloway and the Scottish Borders are large, rural areas that require a bespoke approach to the challenges of distance and rurality. The bill allows for that, but ensures standards of care. Dumfries and Galloway and the Scottish Borders are separate areas with bespoke requirements, but certain standards will be matched nationally, which has to be welcomed, as it will ensure high standards of care.

I would have thought that the Opposition could get behind improving care standards and ensuring equity of care, but instead they simply continue to moan.

I turn to self-directed support, which I have worked on since my re-election. SDS allows people to receive money from their respective local authority, to be spent where people feel is most appropriate for them. That might be help with the management of a health condition or disability, help with buying technology, help with getting out and about, or even support for attending work or college. Over the summer, the minister came to Dumfries where we heard directly the lived experience of people who were receiving self-directed support.

That is all part of how we move forward—by engaging with and listening to people and through co-production with them in order that we have the best bill to take forward.

I realise that I am out of time, Deputy Presiding Officer. Thank you.

15:56

**Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab):** I ask the members sitting opposite me to consider the fact that it is our responsibility as parliamentarians to debate the issues—we have that right. I hope

that the member who spoke before me asks for some Government time so that we do not have to have short debates.

The bill on a national care service has promised a great deal but, with each passing month, the weight of that ambition has been forgotten. Instead of building a truly revolutionary service, the Scottish Government is tinkering around the edges of what the service would mean on the ground, while concentrating power in its own hands rather than in those of carers or people who require care.

**Emma Harper:** I think that Carol Mochan is asking the Government to take information forward. We have just begun scrutiny. Will we not have a stage 1 debate, in which we will be able to debate the bill in the chamber again?

**Carol Mochan:** We have to scrutinise the bill, and part of that is for the Government to bring more debates to the chamber so that we can debate the issues more fully, which are important and on which people have concerns.

The national care service is a mere shadow of what a universal care service could be, and it does not, at this stage, seem worthy of the name. The Scottish Government is not proposing a national care service in this plan; as it exists currently, it would lead only to a national procurement and commissioning service, dressed up in the language of radical change.

The profit motive is at the heart of everything in this plan, and the harsh reality of low pay and poor conditions for most workers are not set to change in any substantial way—there is no drive from the Government for collective bargaining or the improvement of pay and terms and conditions of the poorest-paid workers.

**Kevin Stewart:** Will the member give way?

**Carol Mochan:** I will make progress, because I am running out of time.

As members might expect, I believe that, through their trade unions, workers understand the drawbacks better than most, yet very few of their concerns have been taken into account when drafting the bill.

Unison has, quite rightly, called the plans “not fit for purpose” and has asked for them to be recalled. I have a lot of sympathy for that position and share the view—made explicit in my party’s amendment—that the process must be paused immediately and that it requires the recommendations that are laid out in the Feeley review to be delivered as a priority. We can do that. If we do not take stock and allow for that to happen, we will create a service that, in essence, is set up to fail and built on the broken foundations of this care service.

The overt centralisation at the heart of the plan is designed to further disempower councils. Unite the union has expressed concerns about the proposal to hand power to

“unaccountable local care boards to deliver services”  
with no democratic mandate.

It is clear that COSLA is firmly against the plans. It has stated that the Government is planning to remove

“decisions around locally delivered social care services ... from communities”

and hand them to

“Scottish Government Ministers in Edinburgh.”

That does not sound like a step forward to me; it sounds like an old-fashioned power grab that will put the future of many jobs firmly in the hands of ministers who are far away from what happens on the ground. Given the state of negotiations with public sector staff, we can understand why care staff and trade unions have serious concerns.

We are not here to simply tick boxes and say that a national care service has been built and then move on to the next manifesto promise. We are here to build something that, like the NHS, will stand the test of time.

I reiterate that the Government must pause the bill, listen to the concerns of carers, service users, councils, trade unions and MSPs, and get it right the first time round. Anything else would be a dereliction of duty.

16:00

**Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green):** I do not often tell personal stories in my speeches, but today I will repeat the story that I shared in my very first speech in the chamber.

My grandpa fell in his house shortly before the council elections in 2017. After that fall and his recovery, he required care in his home for the rest of his life. His carers were far more than help around the house—they enhanced and enriched his life. He loved to tell stories, and what his carers and, often, their families were up to became part of the stories that we were told. We knew that he was safe with them, and they often stayed to make us a cup of tea when we needed it, too. Words could never express how grateful I am to each and every one of them.

His experience, and the fact that not everyone has that experience, is what drives my approach to the national care service. We must ensure that people receive person-centred care. I acknowledge the anxiety about the lack of detail in the bill. Framework bills do not give the immediate certainty that is needed, but the bill provides

people who receive care, their families and their care workers with the ability to offer input to how the service runs. Let us not pretend that our current system is one in which their voices are always heard. The bill gives us the chance to get things right.

Fair work must be at the heart of that. I was hugely frustrated to hear from my grandpa's carers about the lack of holiday pay, sick pay and maternity pay, and even lack of consideration for something as basic as local knowledge.

**Carol Mochan:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Gillian Mackay:** I am really sorry, but I have a lot to get through.

I heard about carers being sent from one end of the local authority area to the other because a manager who did not know the area thought that the trip from Bo'ness to Larbert could be done in 10 minutes, only for the carers to come back to Grangemouth after that. Caring for care workers must be at the heart of the bill. That is why I will lodge amendments to further embed, at the heart of the bill, fair work as part of ethical procurement. I will work with the minister and unions to address concerns.

We know that there is a mixed picture across the country, but social care workers in Falkirk should have the same terms, conditions and working culture as those in Argyll and Bute. For people who receive the care, how they receive it and what they are entitled to should also be the same everywhere. That is a fundamental principle of the national care service and one of the main reasons why we want to see the bill progress.

Culture change must be a key part of any social care reform, and as I said in the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee meeting on Tuesday, culture change does not often come without huge costs attached. I agree with Mr O'Kane—as, I am sure, the minister does—that any of those issues could be tackled now. In the joint working group involving COSLA and the Scottish Government, I would like to see discussion and agreement on ways to do that and to advance it now.

In yesterday's HSCS Committee meeting, we heard COSLA's concerns about appointments to care boards being the minister's decision. Might the minister address that in his closing remarks?

**Paul O'Kane:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Gillian Mackay:** I am really sorry, but I need to keep going.

We can agree that there are some good things in the bill. We all recognise the importance of Anne's law. I met campaigners outside Parliament,

as did others from across the chamber. The pandemic robbed many people of their last precious hours and days. I want better and consistently offered bereavement support for unpaid carers, as well as support with manual handling and, crucially, the right to short breaks. We need to ensure that that is implemented consistently to ensure that breaks are available, in a way that is useful to them, for people who have multiple caring responsibilities.

In reality, there is too much to cover in four minutes. There are real opportunities through co-design and secondary legislation to be flexible, to listen, to take account and to change things that do not work as anticipated. I recognise the anxiety around the lack of detail, but I look forward to working with carers' organisations, with people with lived experience and with care workers in order to ensure that the bill delivers on its core aim, which is to make things better and more consistent for people who use the social care system and people who work in it.

16:04

**Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP):** The Tory motion is, quite frankly, a disservice to the social care sector here in Scotland. The establishment of a national care service will be the most ambitious reform of public services since the creation of the national health service. The aim is to ensure consistent, fair and high-quality care for everyone in Scotland, thereby reducing the current variations that many folk have raised over recent years.

The Tory motion is simply wrong. A national care service is not about nationalisation of services. The bill—maybe Tory members should actually read it—sets out that, at national level, the functions will be focused on consistency through national oversight. Services will continue to be designed and delivered locally. That is right in order to support delivery with and for our communities and the people whom those services serve.

**Craig Hoy:** Will the member give way?

**Jackie Dunbar:** I am sorry. I normally take interventions, but today I have only four minutes.

National oversight will allow for better sharing of good practice and innovation, which we know takes place right across our country. For example, for years Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council have pooled resources to get best value, when possible. It can be done. The proposed changes will bring forward new power-sharing arrangements at national and local levels. They will deliver a mix of the clarity that people want on ultimate accountability and, crucially, they will deliver the flexibility to meet local needs,

including the needs of our island and rural communities.

The Tory motion questions the Scottish Government's financial estimates for the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill, as well as the rationale for it, but the bill follows the independent review of adult social care, which showed the need for change and recommended reform and strengthening of national accountability for social care. The review found that the current way of working has not fully delivered the improvements that it was intended would be achieved by integration of health and social care. It showed that the current approach to social care is simply not working, because the current system focuses on profit over people, and it said that that must change.*[Interruption.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Hoy!

**Jackie Dunbar:** The Tory motion appears to support the findings of the Feeley review, but it would deprive Parliament of the tools to deliver the change that is needed. The Tories' so-called local care service would fail to address the fundamental issues of consistency, quality and access. It would add to the postcode lottery of care that the current system provides. For example, it would allow differences between delivery of care in Aberdeen Donside and delivery in Glasgow city. Perhaps in their summing up, the Tories could clarify how their plan would deal with the current postcode lottery, which they constantly complain about.

Any spending decisions that are made on the national care service will be backed by rigorous evidence-based decisions. The costs in the financial memorandum largely represent investments in service improvements and terms and conditions for our vital front-line care staff. Any suggestion that the figures relate exclusively to admin costs are totally false and misleading. The bill will also remove unwarranted duplication of functions, thereby providing best value for public funds, which is to be welcomed.

The creation of a national care service reinforces the Government's wider commitment to taking long-term action to change our society and make it a fairer and more equal place in which to live, work and play.

We need to grasp this opportunity to deliver public service improvement together. I encourage the Opposition to work constructively with the Scottish Government on the bill. Let's get this right for a'bodie.

16:09

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** I am grateful to have the opportunity to contribute to today's debate on the national care service and

the crucial proposed legislation on it. I have been engaged with local authorities on the matter for some time—in fact, I spoke to the chief executive of East Ayrshire Council, Eddie Fraser, on Monday in preparation for this debate.

First, it is important that, as a Parliament, we accept the current situation and work together to develop a solution to what is a continually developing crisis.

Health and social care in this country is in crisis; quite frankly, it is much worse than is being reported. Front-line staff are working flat out, way beyond what should be reasonably asked of them, to look after people who need healthcare. We are all truly thankful for everything that they do, but we cannot rely indefinitely on their good will.

Earlier this week, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care suggested that it will take five years to redress the current crisis. There are two things that I would say to that. Given that the issue existed long before Covid but has been exacerbated by it, the first thing that I would ask the cabinet secretary is, "Why didn't you start to redress the problem five years ago?" Secondly, I say that it will take a lot longer than five years to get a fully functioning and fully staffed NHS and social care sector. That is a couple of decades away—four parliamentary sessions, so the Parliament in this session will not get the credit. A long-term strategy has to be put in place and initiated. Will the cabinet secretary be brave enough to put those wheels in motion?

Let us accept the situation that we are in and discuss it with a view to developing solutions. First, the social care sector says that it is an entity in itself, and its message is that it is not to blame for the current NHS issues. Childcare, child social care, adult social care and general social care are all part of the mix. Although we talk about a postcode lottery for social care, it is only when things go especially wrong that we hear about it. There are many positive outcomes across the country. The message from local authorities is that structural change is not required where things are not working. What is required is targeted support for areas that are struggling to deliver services. We should not throw the baby out with the bath water, but should instead learn from areas that are delivering really good services and apply that learning where improvement is needed.

There are substantial differences in how councils deliver social care, especially between rural and urban areas. Local authorities understand what dictates how services should be delivered, so the proposed SNP centralisation of services will not solve the current crisis. Where is the evidence that this is the path to take? Why does the SNP think that it knows better than local authorities, professional healthcare workers and

the many stakeholders—as my colleague Craig Hoy said—who already deliver the services?

Finally, we need to retain staff. What is required is a system that is financed properly to account for the work that social care does through both public and private providers. Finance should also include provision to offer a decent pension, as part of the package. It must value our social care workers and ensure that staff retention is at the top of the agenda.

Social care is about relationship building and continuity of care to provide better patient outcomes. There is no evidence that a national care service will help the situation in any way. What is needed is a system-wide evaluation of health and social care that is designed for need, not demand. Social care being provided in the way that the SNP is proposing is not just unworkable; it is unaffordable.

16:13

**Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** I found the motion to be quite puzzling. The Conservatives cannot seem to decide what point they are making—whether the issue at hand is getting good care to people who need it, or not spending public money on public services. I believe that the system should be about getting good care to people who need it.

“Postcode lottery” is a favourite term of the Conservatives, but today they are criticising the Scottish Government for taking forward proposals to create a national care service—an idea that is overwhelmingly backed by the public and would standardise care across the country—and are instead suggesting that we implement what is, essentially, a formal postcode lottery.

I am a Highlands and Islands MSP and I hate centralisation, but this is not centralisation. We can have national standards without centralising. From everything that I have heard so far about the proposals and the overall intention of this ambitious public sector overhaul, I am not worried that it is a power grab. The proposals are about combining national standards with local expertise to get rid of a postcode lottery.

As the bill takes shape, colleagues can count on me spending the rest of the process making sure that Highlands and Islands voices are heard and that their local expertise and local good practice—where it exists, and it does exist—are taken forward.

I have already heard extremely helpful, constructive and thoughtful input to the proposals from people with lived experience of caring or of receiving care. This is a huge opportunity, and it would be a real shame to chuck it out instead of

putting in the work. As a Conservative colleague asked only minutes ago, why throw the baby out with the bath water?

Besides the fact that it is ridiculous to say that because the care sector is in crisis it is the wrong time to fix it, I find the brass neck of the Tories in talking about the care crisis at all astounding, because nothing has harmed care services recruitment more than Brexit, which their party forced on this country. Despite the best efforts of the Scottish Government, we are haemorrhaging EU nationals who worked, or would have worked, in those roles.

I mentioned earlier the fact that the Conservatives voted against the creation of the national health service—our NHS—22 times. I would have hoped that by now, in 2022, we would have got to the point at which we do not need a war to get folk behind us in looking after our citizens.

Out of interest, I looked up *Hansard* for the debate on the 1942 Beveridge report—which was not the first attempt at creating a national health service but was the beginning of the successful one—because I suspected, correctly, that there might be some similarities between that debate and today’s debate.

On 16 February 1943, Sir William Davison, a Conservative MP, questioned the cost of delivering that massive overhaul of social security, and asked:

“What about the millions of money for those who are not in want?”

Arthur Greenwood, of Labour, responded:

“They ought to thank God that they are in those happy circumstances”.

Scottish Unionist Charles MacAndrew also worried about the cost, and told the House:

“It does not satisfy me to be told that we cannot afford to be without it”—[*Official Report*, House of Commons, 16 February 1943; Vol 386, c 1620, 1646.]

However, I think that all of us here today agree that NHS Scotland is vital—that it is a core institution and that it is worth spending massive amounts of money on for the sake of saving and improving lives—and that we also agree that we cannot afford to be without it.

I encourage members to think about the following question when they speak. In 80 years, what will folk who are living in a country with a national care service think when they dig up some members’ comments in the *Official Report*, and will they be on the right side of history, this time?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to closing speeches. I note that some members who



participated in the debate do not appear to be here. I will expect an explanation for that.

16:17

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** As Paul O’Kane rightly stated, Scottish Labour called for the creation of a national care service more than a decade ago. It was rejected by the then health secretary, Nicola Sturgeon, but now the SNP has finally caught on to the idea. However, the SNP’s lack of understanding and vision has led to a pale imitation of what a national care service could be.

Demand for a national care service has never been greater as we emerge from the pandemic. Social care has been underfunded for too long, with the rationing of care based on budgets rather than on the assessing and meeting of need—and, ultimately, dealing only with crisis rather than with prevention. Social workers and social care workers have been holding together a system that is fractured and under strain.

Cultural change is needed. Let us liberate our social care professionals to do the jobs that they were trained to do—that is, to help people live independently, to focus on prevention and to meet need. Furthermore, let us fund it properly. Today, however, we have learned that £70 million has been reprioritised, which sounds like a cut to me. I will be happy to hear from the minister on that point in his closing speech.

The SNP lacks ambition and views a national care service as entirely about structural change with little, if any, new money on the table. A framework bill with no detail reminds me of the tale of the emperor’s new clothes—there is simply nothing there. It is simply not good enough to say that the details will be worked out later and to bring in sweeping changes by secondary legislation.

We believe in co-design and co-production—we share the Government’s view on that. However, that really needs to be done in advance of legislation, not after. The bill should have laid out plans for the creation of the biggest publicly funded social care system since the creation of the NHS. It should have laid out a coherent vision for the future of care in this country—improving standards, investing in staff and enhancing care. However, it falls far short of that. It is so bereft of vision that millions of pounds have been paid in fees to private sector consultants to tell the Government what to do. We must listen to the experts—that is, those receiving care and their carers, or the many social care staff—but we must do so in advance.

We know what some of them think, though. Social Work Scotland, which is the key professional body, has asked the Scottish

Government to pause the bill and think again. Unison, which represents many social care workers, wants the bill not just to be paused but to be withdrawn. COSLA has made it clear that the wholesale transfer of staff must be removed from the plans entirely before it engages any further, and countless voluntary sector groups have major reservations about the proposals. I agree with Gillian Mackay’s comments about staff, and I am sure that she shares my disappointment that the bill is silent on all those issues.

Let me turn to money. The Finance and Public Administration Committee savaged the financial memorandum. It was only doing its job, because it did not think that the money stacked up. We have no idea, for example, whether VAT will have to be paid or what happens to pensions if people are transferred, because that is not covered. The committee was followed swiftly by Audit Scotland, which said that the financial memorandum is

“likely to significantly understate the margin of uncertainty and range of potential costs”.

It is clear that £1.3 billion is the tip of the iceberg. The Feeley review identified a funding gap of £660 million a year, but the Government is committing to only £800 million over three years. We cannot get decent social care on the cheap, and if the Government underfunds this from the start, it will fail. The Government should pause now and take the time to think this through and get it right, because we cannot afford to fail. There is a pressing need to do things now.

In closing, I say to Emma Harper and Jackie Dunbar that we want the bill to be the most ambitious reform of public sector services. As currently drafted, it is not. We want to work constructively with Government, but let us do the right and mature thing: pause the bill to strengthen it, because it is too important to fail. We need to get this right.

16:21

**Kevin Stewart:** The ultimate establishment of a national care service will be the most ambitious reform of public services since the creation of the NHS. It will end the postcode lottery of care provision, ensuring quality, fairness and consistency of provision that meets individuals’ needs.

A lot of the focus of today’s speeches has been on structures. The Government’s focus is on getting it right for people, which is why co-design lies at the very heart of what we are going to do to achieve the best possible national care service.

This is not about centralisation. The bill sets out that, at a national level, the functions of the service will be focused on consistency through national oversight. Services will continue to be designed

and delivered locally; it is right to support delivery with and for our communities and the people whom they serve.

**Craig Hoy:** Does Mr Stewart agree with COSLA that consistency does not necessarily mean an increase in quality of care?

**Kevin Stewart:** Consistency does not necessarily mean quality, but what will bring quality is the national care standards, which will eradicate the postcode lotteries that Mr Hoy and his colleagues regularly moan about. I hope that at the very least they see the benefit of those national high-quality standards.

A change of this scale will take time. We will not rush the design process, and we will develop the detail in partnership with people who have experience of using the services, people who are delivering them on the front line and our stakeholders and partners. No decisions have been taken on whether children's services, justice or social work should be included in the scope of the national care service. The Government is establishing a programme of evidence gathering and research to inform those future decisions.

This afternoon's debate has allowed important contributions from across the chamber to be made on the proposals for a national care service. Some of them, including those from Gillian Mackay, Jackie Dunbar and Emma Harper, have been very positive and have had people at their heart. We also had a wee bit of a history lesson from Emma Roddick. History often repeats itself, and it is repeating itself on the Tory benches today.

We have heard repeatedly from people with direct experience of community health and social care and key stakeholders that the adult social care system needs to change in order to drive up standards to a consistent level across the country. The independent review referenced the current fragmented and dislocated system, and it is disappointing not to have heard more in the debate about the views of the people whom we represent.

Change of this scale naturally raises questions and concerns, and we have a duty to people to work through those with all of our partners, including local government, health and social care partnerships, unions and providers, to understand their position and use it to inform, design and, ultimately, deliver. I ask that all of us champion this, engage with it and contribute to the on-going discussion. My door is open to all, because we have a responsibility to people to get this absolutely right.

In order to support people to get involved in the discussion, we have identified a set of early co-design themes. They are information sharing; improving health and social care support; realising

rights and recognising responsibilities; keeping health and social care support local; making sure that people's voices are heard; and valuing the workforce. In September, we launched the lived experience panels to help us in that regard, and we have also established a stakeholder register for stakeholders to become involved in the co-design of our national care service. This is the biggest change since the formation of the NHS and we want to ensure that people are involved in its design.

**Jackie Baillie:** Will the member give way?

**Kevin Stewart:** I am in my last 10 seconds.

Community health and social care will, at some point, reach into all of our lives. Everyone should have high-quality services, regardless of where they live in Scotland, and I hope that everyone will join us in getting the national care service formation absolutely right.

16:26

**Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con):** The Scottish Government needs to see sense and change its reckless and unaffordable plan to create a national care service. Prior to today's debate, the plan has been described as

"a sledgehammer to crack a nut"

and

"a blank cheque"

from

"the public purse"—[*Official Report, Finance and Public Administration Committee*, 25 October 2022; c 24, 16.]

by none other than the SNP's own members on the Finance and Public Administration Committee. Moreover, the chief executive of Ayrshire Council described the SNP's plan as "truly unstable" for social work and social care; the Scottish Human Rights Commission was critical of the "vague" and unhelpful language round the proposed charter of rights; and many more stakeholders have voiced their deep concerns.

Frankly, the SNP and the Greens are not speaking for those organisations, for the hard-working social care staff, for those receiving care and certainly not for taxpayers. The SNP and the Greens do not have their backs, and they do not speak for Scotland.

**Kevin Stewart:** When I leave today's debate, I will be talking to Unison, and this morning, I spoke and listened to the Camphill communities. We have been out talking to the people at the forefront of care, both those who receive it and those who deliver it. No one can say that we are not listening, because we are.

**Sandesh Gulhane:** To be frank, I do not think that the minister is listening, because if he was, he would not be going ahead with this awful plan.

The SNP has spent years hollowing out our local councils with savage funding cuts. Indeed, we see that today in SNP and Green-run Glasgow, which has a deficit 10 times higher than it was last year. The plans for a national care service would scrap local accountability; they impose total ministerial control; and they represent a direct assault on local government. Again, they would scrap local accountability.

The SNP's plan for a national care service amounts to a blatant power grab. We agree that social care provision in Scotland is in crisis, but the last thing that we need right now is a major, bureaucratic overhaul of the system that would see precious resources diverted away from the front line into employing more management and more administration staff. The SNP needs to abandon these plans and put every penny into local care services, because we simply cannot afford to see £1.3 billion diverted away from the front line when we are crying out for help.

We support a local care service, because it is important to protect individual choice and control. No one should be forced to access care that is miles away from their community, family and support network. That is why our local care service would include a local guarantee that would ensure that support was delivered as close as possible to those who need it, especially those in rural and island communities.

Allow me to turn to some excellent points that have been made during the debate. Craig Hoy reminded the Parliament why the cabinet secretary and his ministers cannot deny that they were warned about the risks of the national care service. We are not talking about warnings from this side of the chamber; they came from charities and from Audit Scotland. Indeed, Craig Hoy went on to list a large number of warnings, which I do not have time to repeat.

My colleague Liz Smith reminded us of the numbers. The Scottish Government thinks that it will spend between £644 million and £1.26 billion, but Audit Scotland thinks that that is an underestimate. As we have been told, the Fraser of Allander Institute talked about groups that were trying to estimate the costs persistently having to question Government civil servants to get some clues as to the additional costs lying beyond the core costs.

In his opening remarks, the minister talked about having a clear bill. That is news to COSLA, which saw the bill only the day before it was published. He also spoke of transparency, but

there is no transparency running through the rest of Government.

The minister went on to say that people were supportive. Why would they not be supportive of laudable aims? However, if he then goes on to say that the service will cost £1.3 billion to set up and that people will have no accountability—

**Kevin Stewart:** Will Dr Gulhane give way?

**Sandesh Gulhane:** No—the minister should listen to this. If he tells people that they will have no accountability, I believe that they will no longer support him—because the SNP fails to deliver.

Paul O'Kane reminded us about how John Swinney listened to stakeholders. Perhaps the minister should copy that and show some humility.

Alex Cole-Hamilton talked about how health and social care have deteriorated under the SNP's watch. In contrast with Kevin Stewart, Mr Cole-Hamilton also pointed out that the bill's financial memorandum contains no details.

Emma Harper does not seem to understand the difference between criticising the woefully inept SNP Government and talking about NHS and social care staff. Our heroic staff are burning out, yet despite the Scottish Government they are doing their best. Did she not hear Councillor Kelly at the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee say that staff are fearful about their jobs? The very staff she speaks about are terrified.

Carol Mochan talked about how the national care service would be a procurement service, which would not actually help the workers. She also reminded us that Unison said that the bill was not fit for purpose. That is a union that represents the workers that Emma Harper talked about but, like her Government colleagues, seemed to ignore.

Emma Roddick started by saying that she was confused, and she asked what people will say in 80 years' time. What they will say is, "What a waste of money." Moreover, if we are going to dig up *Hansard* records from 80 years ago, I will perhaps not tell her what her party wrote in a memo dated 15 August 1943. Perhaps I can get Ms Roddick to look that up for herself.

It is very important that Scottish ministers listen to what everyone has been saying. To quote Liz Smith, the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill is in deep trouble, and the minister knows it.

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

## Road Improvements

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-06520, in the name of Graham Simpson, on essential road improvements.

16:34

**Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):** We have been here before. Nearly a year ago we held an almost identical debate, calling on the Scottish Government to reaffirm its commitment to dualling the A9 and the A96, and to commit to upgrading other roads. We lost. The Scottish National Party amended our motion to take out any reference to particular roads.

Today, the SNP amendment mentions both roads, but nowhere in it is a commitment to fully dual them. Instead, we have the language of short-term fixes and a review. It looks very much as though those historic commitments lie in the gutter.

The SNP was once behind these projects. It committed to fully dualling the A9 between Perth and Inverness by 2025. Since that pledge was made 11 years ago, just over 12 miles have been completed—a little over a mile a year. At that rate, it will be 2086 by the time the other 70 miles are complete. I am afraid to say that none of us will be around to see it. Nicola Sturgeon can cancel the photo call—there will be no selfies on the A9 for her, and nor should there be, because there is a very sorry tale to tell.

Since our debate last year, a number of lives have been lost. So far this year, there have been 12 deaths on the A9 between Perth and Inverness—the highest number for 12 years, and all on single-carriageway sections. The latest incident—last month—saw 64-year-old George Norris killed when his Ford C-Max was in a collision with two other vehicles near Kingussie. Also in October, a man and a woman died when their car collided with a lorry near Birnam, south of Dunkeld. There were two fatal crashes on the A9 in September, one near Slochd and another near Dunkeld, along with a fatality near Carrbridge on 30 September. That followed three members of one American family dying after a collision with a lorry on the A9 near Newtonmore on 10 August. Further, in July, 68-year-old David McPherson died in a crash at Slochd summit near Carrbridge, with his 65-year-old wife, Elza, and their two-year-old grandson dying in hospital a short time later.

Some 333 people have been killed on the A9 between Perth and Inverness since 1979. That is why we need desperately to fully dual that road. Accidents will continue to happen—there are different reasons for all accidents—but there will

be far fewer of them. We can literally save lives by investing in these roads.

What about the A96? Thankfully, the death toll on the A96 this year has not been as bad as it has been on the A9. There was one fatality, though, in January, when 78-year-old John Channon of Dyce died following a crash near Auldearn.

The campaign to dual the A96 has been going on for 30 years. As far back as 1989, *The Press and Journal* was running a campaign called “end the carnage, spend the cash”. At that point, it was the UK Government that was responsible. It did not end the carnage and it did not spend the cash, and nothing has really changed since devolution.

In 2011, the SNP committed to completing the dualling of the road between Inverness and Aberdeen by 2030. Of course, that was before it did its deal with the Greens, which put a halt to things while we wait for a “transparent, evidence-based review” of the environmental impacts of the project. Last year, Transport Scotland was claiming that the study would be completed by the end of this year, and the minister’s amendment today makes the same claim.

I can only hope that Transport Scotland has not been listening too much to the words of Green MSP Maggie Chapman, who predicted last year that the review would find that it “isn’t viable to dual the whole way”.

The problem that we have here is that the SNP has been ensnared by the Greens. It is almost as though Jenny Gilruth has to ask permission from Maggie Chapman to do anything. We can imagine the conversation: “Please, Maggie, can I dual the roads?”; “No, minister—don’t you remember? It’s not viable.” We really are in a bad place if we are to base our roads improvement programme on the views of Maggie Chapman.

Of course, investing in those roads is not just about road safety. Making transport easier boosts the local and—because of the roads’ strategic importance—national economy. Members would not expect the anti-growth Greens to understand that, but I would have thought that wiser heads in the SNP might do so.

It would be remiss of me not to mention other roads in Scotland that are in dire need of improvement, such as the A75 and A77. Between 2018 and last year, on those two roads, there were nine fatal accidents—a shocking toll of death. Today, I met members of the A77 action group—

**Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** Will the member take an intervention?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Simpson is bringing his remarks to a close.

**Graham Simpson:** I am happy to take the intervention.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You will have to conclude your speech within your allotted seven minutes.

**Finlay Carson:** Will Mr Simpson join me in welcoming the news that, after concerted efforts from the Conservative benches, the Scottish Government has dropped its grievance-led, hard-line, no co-operation approach on the union connectivity and is now engaging positively in how our two Governments can come together to bring much-needed investment to the A75?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Graham Simpson, you have 20 seconds left.

**Graham Simpson:** I thoroughly agree with Mr Carson, who is a champion of these roads. I do not want to be here, moving this motion, because it should not be necessary.

With regret, I move,

That the Parliament notes with alarm the number of recent fatalities on the A9 and A96; recognises the pain that these tragedies have caused families; believes that fully dualling both roads could lead to a significant improvement in road safety as well as helping the economy; notes the SNP administration's previous commitment to fully dual the A9 between Perth and Inverness and the A96, and calls on the Scottish Government to set out when these vital works will be completed.

16:41

**The Minister for Transport (Jenny Gilruth):** I thank the Conservatives for bringing forward today's motion for debate. The tone of the motion is respectful to the families of those who have lost loved ones on Scotland's roads, and I will, of course, continue that sentiment throughout my contribution.

The publication of reported road casualties in Scotland for 2021 showed a broadly stable picture of deaths and injuries on our roads—there was one fewer fatality than in 2020, and a single percentage increase in injuries. However, that will not be the picture for 2022. We already know that the statistics for this year are going to be very different. To date, in 2022, 10 fatal injury accidents have been recorded on the A9 trunk road, with 15 fatal casualties. Of the 10 fatal accidents, seven occurred between Perth and Inverness, resulting in 12 fatal casualties. To compare that with previous years, there was only one fatal accident between Perth and Inverness in each year of 2019, 2020 and 2021.

Every death on the A9—or any of Scotland's roads—is one too many. Every life lost has devastating impacts for families, friends, colleagues and communities. I express my

sympathies to everyone who has been affected by such a loss, and to anyone who has been injured on our roads. We know the very human cost of loss and the toll that it takes on our emergency services.

I am sure that members will understand that, because police investigations into recent accidents are on-going, it would not be appropriate for me or any of us to comment significantly on any individual case today. However, I assure members that I have met Police Scotland in recent weeks in Inverness to better understand the increase in fatal accidents and the underlying contributory factors.

On Friday this week, in Pitlochry, I will chair the A9 safety group, which includes wider partners from our roads operating company, Police Scotland, the road haulage and freight transport associations, local authorities and the Confederation of Passenger Transport. Thereafter, I will meet constituency and regional members to hear their views and concerns and to ensure that those are taken into account in planning the required short-term interventions. In the coming weeks, I will announce additional short-term measures for the A9 between Perth and Inverness, in advance of dualling works.

It is worth saying that, this year alone, the Scottish Government has invested more than £7 million in spend on maintenance, structures and road safety improvements on the A9.

**Graham Simpson:** Of course, short-term measures can have an effect, but would the minister accept that fully dualling both of those roads could lead to a significant improvement in road safety?

**Jenny Gilruth:** I think that Mr Simpson makes a fair assertion. If he does not mind, I will come to that later in my remarks.

We have made that investment and, this year, we will make further investments to improve safety at Ballinluig, Bruar and Ralia. However, I accept that more will need to be done before full dualling is complete.

The Government remains committed to investment in the A9, including dualling the road between Perth and Inverness. As I mentioned, we have already invested significant finance—approximately £431 million to date—delivering the dualling programme. That has allowed road users to benefit from the dualled stretches between Kincaig and Dalraddy and between Luncarty and Pass of Birnam, which opened in September 2017 and August 2021 respectively. It has also supported the development, progress through statutory processes, advance works and procurement evaluation work being undertaken for the remainder of the programme.

We are currently in procurement for the award of the construction contract for the section between Tomatin and Moy. Final decisions on that will be subject to our normal tender evaluation and business case approval. We are also progressing design work on the rest of the programme, with the statutory process being well under way for seven of the eight remaining sections.

The Pass of Birnam to Tay crossing project has not started the statutory process yet, but Transport Scotland is currently progressing the design and assessment work to identify the preferred route option for that section, following the innovative co-creative process with the local community. Further, work is on-going to determine the most suitable procurement options for those remaining sections of the road, which needs to involve consideration of a range of factors, including how the project can be delivered most efficiently by the industry while minimising disruption to road users. I hope that the wider MSP forum that my private office has contacted members about today will seek to set out to members some of the detail of those sections.

I turn to the A96. As Mr Simpson noted, there has not been a similar increase in accidents on the A96—he pointed out one fatality this year. It is worth saying that we are talking about very different roads, but it remains the Government's commitment to fully dual the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen.

**Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I am grateful to hear that commitment to fully dual the A96, which I hope to see come to fruition. The minister was written to in September by Moray Chamber of Commerce, which outlined how important the dualling is for businesses in Moray. So far, there has been no response, so will the minister get in touch with Moray Chamber of Commerce, which needs reassurance from the Scottish Government that this infrastructure link will be delivered?

**Jenny Gilruth:** I am happy to do so. I apologise to Mr Ross and to Moray Chamber of Commerce, and I will ensure that it receives a response from my private office.

As members know, and as has been alluded to already, we are undertaking a transparent, evidence-based review of the corridor. The recent public consultation received nearly 5,000 responses, which generated more than 11,000 suggestions and potential opportunities for the route. Rightly, it has taken more time than was originally planned to look at and appraise all of those options, but there will be a report on the public consultation and the initial appraisal will be published by the end of the year, as my amendment makes clear and as Mr Simpson alluded to.

We also continue the preparation for the dualling of the Inverness to Nairn section, which is quite a different section of the route. Members might recall that it has already received ministerial consent following a public local inquiry, and I expect to be able to make the orders on that part of the A96 in the coming weeks.

Earlier this year, I was pleased to meet the constituency MSP and MP in Nairn, and to meet local school children at Rosebank primary school. The playground of the primary school borders the A96, and the pupils explained to me what that means for their learning, outdoor play and environment. Therefore, it is imperative that we deliver on these road improvements for local communities, particularly, in my view, for the generations yet to come.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Minister, I appreciate that you took two interventions, which I am sure that members wanted to hear your responses to, but I must ask you to wind up.

**Jenny Gilruth:** I move amendment S6M-06520.2, to leave out from “believes that” to end and insert:

“and indeed the pain caused by all fatalities and serious accidents across Scotland’s road network; acknowledges that Transport Scotland is working with Police Scotland and partner agencies to understand the circumstances of recent accidents; notes that, as investigations continue, it would be inappropriate for the Parliament to comment on individual cases further; agrees that road safety is paramount and, while the Scottish Government is investing record amounts in road safety to help meet the long-term goal of zero fatalities and injuries on Scotland’s roads by 2050, there is more to do with short-term measures to address specific safety issues on trunk roads like the A9 and A96; acknowledges the investment of £400 million to date for dualling the A9 between Perth and Inverness and that work is continuing across the A9, and notes the Scottish Government’s commitment to take forward a transport enhancements programme on the A96 corridor and that the review of the programme to fully dual the A96 will report by the end of the year.”

16:48

**Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** I thank Graham Simpson for bringing the debate to the chamber. I would normally say about one of his debates that I welcome the debate, but, as he acknowledged, we would rather not be discussing the serious topic of road safety in such tragic circumstances.

Over the past decade, almost 200 people have sadly lost their lives on Highland roads. In the past six years, more than half of the deaths in the area took place on the A9, A96 and A82. In just the past three months, there have been a further eight deaths on a 25-mile stretch of the A9 alone. One of those who was killed was just two years old.

As the death toll on the A9 climbs, it is now at its highest in 20 years. As the minister said, every report of a fatality relates to a person with a family left behind. We can only imagine the pain that is felt by family members and friends who have lost loved ones on those roads. We must do all that we can to make roads such as the A9 and A96 safer, and I welcome what the minister said about short-term measures.

I am concerned, as I am sure other members are, to hear reports that not only are police officer numbers being cut across Scotland but the number of traffic police officers is being reduced. That issue must be addressed and looked at in the context of the areas that we are talking about today. It is also crucial that, in the long term, the Government invests to upgrade those roads.

The SNP has given clear manifesto commitments to dual the A9 by 2025 and to dual the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen by 2030. John Swinney, the then Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, in answer to Mr Harvie, said that he recognised the very

“serious and alarming safety records”—[*Official Report*, 6 June 2019; c 20.]

on those roads.

The situation appears to be getting worse, not better. Therefore, local people expect the SNP to deliver on its promises.

We must see urgent and major investment in our transport infrastructure across Scotland—in rail, roads, ferries and active travel. The criteria for investment need to take fully into account safety issues, journey times and economic and community development, as well as the impact on the climate.

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** Today, Neil Bibby and I were in a meeting with the A75 and A77 action group—the A77 campaign team. What is the member’s response to the group’s assertion that, during a meeting with the minister, she said that she had to ask the Greens’ permission to do any road infrastructure projects?

**Neil Bibby:** I will come on to that. I thank Mr Whittle for his intervention.

Investment to upgrade transport infrastructure is not just an issue for the north and north-east of Scotland; it is an issue for the south-west of Scotland, too. Earlier today, along with Mr Whittle, I met the A77 campaign team, which is campaigning for the A77 and A75 to be upgraded and brought up to dual carriageway standards.

As well as the need to address safety issues, there are strong economic grounds for investment,

given that those roads are our main link to Northern Ireland.

I am aware that the group met the minister earlier, and I understand that, as Mr Whittle said, the group was concerned that the minister said that the partnership with the Greens may hinder the SNP’s efforts to progress the matter.

**Jenny Gilruth:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Neil Bibby:** I certainly will take an intervention. I would be grateful if the minister could clarify whether the Greens have a veto on SNP roads policy—yes or no?

**Jenny Gilruth:** I do not appreciate two members separately taking words that were given in a private meeting with a group in relation to a road earlier today—[*Interruption.*] Well, neither of them was in the room.

I had a very positive meeting with the action group. I made time to meet the group and to listen to its concerns. I would be grateful if the member could clarify his understanding of that conversation.

I had a wide-ranging conversation with the group, including, as I think that Mr Carson alluded to, in relation to the UK Government. A wide range of matters was discussed.

I do not think that it is appropriate, Presiding Officer, to have my words in a meeting that neither member was present at repeated in the chamber today. Perhaps the member would like to correct the record to that effect.

**Neil Bibby:** I notice that the minister did not answer my question about whether the Greens have a veto on SNP policy. She is not denying the claim that was made.

As I said, I understand that the group was concerned that the minister told them that the Greens’ partnership with the SNP may hinder the SNP’s efforts to progress the matter. I am not aware that such meetings are secret meetings, Presiding Officer.

Earlier, I listed the factors that should be considered in determining priorities for infrastructure investment. One factor that really should not be present for the SNP when taking a decision is whether the Greens like it. People deserve clarity on the Scottish Government’s position on roads investment. We need to know from the SNP whether the Greens have a veto over its roads policy.

People also deserve clarity from the Green party on its position when it comes to votes on roads investment. When we last debated roads in this Parliament almost a year ago, the Greens attacked my party, which believes that money

needs to be spent on upgrading key routes. The Scottish Government's amendment spells out in black and white that more than £400 million has been spent on dualling the A9 to date—more than £400 million has been allocated in budgets that the Greens have voted for. That begs the question: if the Greens are against spending money on roads, why do they keep backing budgets in which money will be spent on roads?

Of course Scottish Labour acknowledges the challenges that we face when it comes to the climate emergency. We must do more to encourage less car travel and to help people on to public transport. That is the subject of our amendment, and I hope that it is an issue on which we can all agree.

However, regrettably, we have seen our public transport system decline under this Government. I have said it before and I will say it again: public transport in Scotland is, frankly, a joke, and there does not seem to be much ambition on show from the Government to address the issue.

We have seen rail fares hiked and 250 rail services a day cut compared with the pre-pandemic timetable. Local councils are still waiting for additional powers and funding from the Government so that they can bring buses—which use roads too, of course—back under public control. Meanwhile, private bus companies continue to fail passengers with skyrocketing fares and cuts to socially necessary routes. Cities such as Manchester and Liverpool are bringing buses back under public control and capping fares at £2. We need to see that action in Scottish cities such as Glasgow, Perth, Inverness and Aberdeen, because we will not get people out of their cars and on to public transport until we have a public transport system that is affordable, accessible and reliable.

There is no better example of how disconnected our communities are than that of one of the areas that we have been talking about today. The BBC journalist Douglas Fraser documented his recent trip by bus from Inverness to Aberdeen, a journey that took five hours, including having to change buses at Broxden interchange station outside Perth. I understand that there is a direct Stagecoach service between Inverness and Aberdeen, but it is not much better, as it takes a staggering four hours and 15 minutes to travel along the A96 from Inverness to Aberdeen. It is a 104-mile journey, which means that people are travelling at an average speed of just 24 miles per hour between those two cities. If we want to reduce traffic on the A96, we also need to consider how to improve bus and other public transport links between those two cities.

We need major and urgent transport infrastructure investment in the areas that we have

discussed today and across other parts of Scotland, including investment in roads, so that we can support building local economies, better connect our communities and take the action that is necessary to address issues around safety, which people have been demanding for many years.

I move amendment S6M-06520.1, to insert at end

“, and further calls on the Scottish Government to urgently publish the final Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR) 2 Report and a clear Delivery Plan for active travel, bus, ferry and rail infrastructure projects, including investment in roads across Scotland that has due regard to road safety, journey times, economic and community development and climate impact, and clear actions to reverse the decline in public transport, which has seen significant cuts to both rail and bus services in Scotland.”

16:56

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** I, too, thank Graham Simpson for allowing Parliament to have this debate and for setting its tone, which I think has been entirely in keeping with the seriousness of the issues. I also thank Neil Bibby for lodging Labour's amendment, which might give me an opportunity, if time permits, to reference ferries without incurring the wrath of the chair for being off-piste.

I also declare an interest. Unlike Edward Mountain and perhaps one or two other colleagues, I am a regular user of the A9, although not, I appreciate, as regular as some. I observe that some of the issues in relation to connectivity and, indeed, safety apply as much beyond Inverness and further north as they do in relation to the Perth to Inverness stage. However, I will focus most of my remarks on the A9, as I am more familiar with the conditions and circumstances on it than I am with the A96.

The case for improvement by dualling has long been accepted, and dualling has long been promised. What we are talking about is the pace at which that commitment is delivered. One of the long-standing arguments has an economic one about the better connectivity that we need, not least between some of our main cities—Perth, Inverness and Aberdeen—but also between many of the outlying towns and villages beyond them. Neil Bibby quite rightly drew attention to travel times, some of which, by rail as well as by road, are absolutely ridiculous by European standards and even by the standards in other parts of the United Kingdom. If we are trying to encourage people out of their cars and on to public transport, those travel times are unlikely to serve that purpose.



However, the focus of the debate is rightly on the safety case for dualling. I looked at the statistics for 2012 to 2019, and there appears to have been a doubling of deaths and serious injuries over that period. I appreciate that there has been a slight change in the way in which serious injuries are captured in the statistics, but they are fairly frightening figures. When we layer upon that what we have seen over the past 12 months, the case seems absolutely unanswerable.

There are undoubtedly individual factors involved in each case. As a regular user of the A9, it often occurs to me that there is a mixture of regular users who are very confident on the road and people, particularly tourists, who are unfamiliar and underconfident, which is a recipe for problems.

We have seen some of those problems arising from the improvements that we have seen in recent years. A situation in which drivers move from single to dual carriageways and in and out of overtaking stretches can be very confusing, particularly for those who are unfamiliar with the road. Alongside that, even for regular users of the road, some of the junctions can be somewhat confusing and therefore precarious.

The safety case is absolutely compelling, but there are other things that need to be done, too. We need to see that modal shift, particularly in terms of getting more freight off the road. Again, I would make that argument for north of Inverness as well as between Perth and Inverness.

With regard to public transport, we need to look beyond the main routes—having bus routes that link in to those main routes are absolutely vital if we are to encourage more people to take up those services.

That talks to the wider strategic review of transport, which is where, using Neil Bibby's amendment, I will segue into the issue of the strategic transport projects review. The exclusion of Orkney's lifeline air and ferry services from that review is absolutely inexcusable and needs to be addressed. I have had useful meetings with the minister on that issue, and I hope that she will be able to confirm that it will be addressed.

I again thank Graham Simpson for allowing Parliament to have this debate and to show the cross-party support that there is for pressing ahead as quickly as possible with the dualling of these vital arteries.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to the open debate.

17:00

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** At the outset, I associate myself with all the

comments that Liam McArthur made, in what was a well-informed contribution on the issues.

The A9 trunk road between Perth and Inverness has an unenviable reputation as Scotland's most dangerous road. Over the years, we have seen too many serious accidents and fatalities, mostly on the single-carriageway sections of the route. As we have heard, this year has been one of the worst on record. In just 10 months, we have had 12 fatalities on single carriageways. Each one of those is a tragedy that has enormous knock-on consequences for the families and friends of those who are involved.

The issue is vital for my constituents in Perthshire who have to use the road daily. They know, as do I, how deadly it is. The matter also affects me personally. In 1990, the car that I was in was involved in a head-on collision on the A9 single carriageway near Carrbridge. I suffered multiple fractures and spent weeks in hospital. I was one of the lucky ones—I survived—but others have not been so fortunate. For decades now, I have been campaigning for A9 improvements, with petitions, at public meetings and by raising the issue in Parliament with successive ministers. It has been clear to me and to many others that only by completing the dualling of the road will we substantially reduce the accident risk.

I was therefore pleased when, in 2011, we saw the first real commitment from the SNP Government, in its infrastructure investment plan, to dual the road in its entirety as far as Inverness. Sadly, since then, progress has been slow. The A9 dualling programme was due to start in 2015 and to be completed by 2025. However, in the 11 years since that commitment was made, just 12.5 miles of dual carriageway has been opened—that is 12.5 miles in 15 years of SNP government. To put that in perspective, the Conservative Governments of Margaret Thatcher and John Major opened 25.3 miles of dual carriageway between Perth and Inverness, which is more than twice as much. I know that Covid has caused delays to all infrastructure projects but, even with that, progress has been painfully slow.

**Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** On the A9 between Perth and Inverness, there are only two areas where compulsory purchase of land for dualling would be difficult—at Dunkeld and Aviemore. Therefore, if the Government wants to meet its target, surely it should get on with dualling the rest of the road and start compulsorily purchasing the land now, because otherwise it will remain a pipe dream.

**Murdo Fraser:** My colleague Mr Mountain makes a very good point. I know that communities along the A9 are now wondering whether the project will ever be completed. The involvement of the anti-road Greens in the Government has

added to their concern. It is noteworthy that, as Graham Simpson pointed out, the Government amendment to today's motion does not restate a commitment to A9 dualling. That is unfortunate. We need to be clear that it will proceed, and we need to know when.

I am regularly contacted by constituents who live beside or close to the A9 and who want clarity on the route. That is particularly the case in communities such as Dunkeld and Birnam, where the A9 passes very close to people's homes and businesses. Without a clear plan and timetable, those properties are effectively blighted. We need clarity, and we need it soon.

There are strong economic arguments for the benefits to Perthshire and the Highlands and Islands from completing A9 dualling but, to me, the issue is principally one of road safety. Too many people have died on the A9 single carriageways. They are dying this year and they will continue to die. That is why we need action now, and it is why we should support Mr Simpson's motion.

17:04

**Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP):** The recent accidents on the A9 are, of course, a tragedy for everyone involved, and my sympathies are with the families and friends of everyone affected by those events.

Dualling of the A96 has been a commitment in successive SNP manifestos. Members might be wondering why I am speaking in the debate. The main east coast road, the A1, passes through my East Lothian constituency and was dualled around 2000. Prior to that, it was a two-lane road with no passing points, and I remember the frustrations of residents, commuters and businesses at that time. I also lost three friends, who were 17 years old, on the road; the three guys were in the same car. I remember that very vividly.

Dualling of the A96 has huge public support for the following reasons. It links two major cities: Aberdeen and Inverness.

**Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Paul McLennan:** I am conscious of the time. I have only four minutes. I am sorry.

The road currently has pinchpoints, and there are large towns in between the cities. The road is used by many slow-moving vehicles, such as agricultural vehicles and heavy goods vehicles, which can cause driver frustration, and there is a lack of safe overtaking opportunities, as was the case with the A1 previously.

Of course, the A96 is a commuter route to Inverness and Aberdeen for many towns and

villages along the corridor. There is an equity and fairness issue in relation to infrastructure for rural areas. There are fast and safe dualled routes between other Scottish cities, but not between Inverness and Aberdeen. That disadvantages residents in all the towns and villages along that corridor.

A review to take into account climate change commitments is, of course, necessary, but it should be balanced with the need to address the long-term safety and equity concerns of users of the corridor. A modern highway that facilitates the fast charging of low-emission vehicles and has safe segregated active travel solutions should be the goal. Slow-moving traffic is bad for emissions. We can see from the Aberdeen western peripheral route how a safe dualled route that facilitates high-gear driving and the overtaking of slow-moving vehicles can reduce emissions in the long term.

The people who use the corridor do not just live in towns right next to the corridor; they also come from more rural towns where people have limited public transport options. That is very similar to the situation in East Lothian. There is a great deal of support in Aberdeenshire and throughout the north-east of Scotland for the dualling of the A96 in order to improve safety, reliability and efficiency for road users. A lot of people are road users because they have no reliable, quick and affordable alternatives. Again, that is similar to the situation in East Lothian in many ways.

Road safety is of paramount importance to the Scottish Government and to the Parliament overall. The road safety framework, which the minister touched on, was backed last year by £21 million—an uplift of £17 million.

As we have heard from the minister, the Scottish Government is absolutely committed to completing the dualling of the A9. I welcome that, but it could be done so much faster if the Scottish Government had more capital funding and if that funding was not being cut at every budget. We heard about the budget pressures from John Swinney earlier this afternoon.

**Liam Kerr:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Paul McLennan:** I have only four minutes.

We all recognise that improved road safety also brings economic benefits to Scotland's road users and local communities. Roads cannot be dualled overnight, and let us remember that the Scottish Government has already invested more than £400 million in dualling the A9, which is part of a £3 billion investment in one of the biggest transport infrastructure projects in Scotland's history.

The Scottish Government remains committed to the north and north-east of Scotland, including by

dualling the A96 corridor and taking forward an enhancements programme to improve connectivity between surrounding towns, to tackle congestion and to address safety and environmental issues. The current plan is to fully dual the A96 route between Inverness and Aberdeen. However, the Scottish Government is, quite rightly, conducting a transparent evidence-based review of the programme, which will report by the end of this year.

The Scottish Government is committed to improving the road network on the A9 and the A96, and I am glad that that commitment has been endorsed by the minister again this afternoon. I share the frustrations of local members, having been through similar experiences with the A1.

17:08

**Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con):** I thank my colleagues for bringing the debate, which is of key importance to my North East Scotland region, to the chamber. It has been 11 years since this shambolic SNP Government first announced that the A96 would be upgraded from a single carriageway to a dual carriageway, but there has been 11 years of broken promises, dither and delay from the Government.

Make no mistake: that delay has cost lives. Between 2018 and 2021, there were 11 fatal accidents and 94 non-fatal accidents on the A96. I send my condolences to all the families who have been affected by those tragic events. Between January and August this year, nine people were seriously injured on the Huntley to Inverness stretch alone of this notorious road.

The grubby deal between the SNP and its anti-growth, anti-business, anti-car and anti-north-east Green partners has not only delayed the project but firmly put the brakes on it. Not just lives depend on the dualling of the A96, but jobs too.

In June, Liz Cameron, the chief executive of Scottish Chambers of Commerce, said that the region needed a “firm commitment” on the dualling, to give the region a “much-needed boost.”

She added that Scottish Chambers of Commerce is

“firmly of the view that the Scottish Government should honour the commitment made to businesses and communities along the A96 that the road is dualled from start to finish, unlocking economic growth, workforce mobility and investment along the route and providing improved connections between two of Scotland’s leading cities and areas of economic growth.”

In an article in the *Press and Journal* last December, haulier Colin Lawson said that

“dualling had to happen urgently”,

and added that

“people in all the towns and surrounding villages within the A96 corridor have suffered enough. It has become one of the worst trunk roads in the UK.”

**Craig Hoy:** Does Mr Lumsden agree that investment is needed across Scotland’s road network, particularly in the south of Scotland, at Sheriffhall, where congestion is building up every single day, largely as a result of the Greens organising a write-in to force it to public inquiry? Does he agree that action on roads is urgently needed also on the A1 at the Belhaven junction?

**Douglas Lumsden:** I agree with the member that investment is needed right across our road network. The Toll of Birness just north of Ellon in my constituency is another area that the Scottish Government needs to focus on.

The dualling of the A96 should be a priority for the Government and it should have been delivered long ago. I speak in this chamber every week about broken promises from this SNP-Green devolved Government of chaos, and that is just one more to add to that long list.

Businesses, residents, the national health service, hauliers, the oil industry and traders have all called on the Government to move forward with the dualling. They are crying out for increased investment in the road network. Public transport is not always a solution for those who live in rural areas, and these trunk roads are a lifeline for our rural communities in the north-east. It is wrong for them to be ignored for 11 years by this Government and for their priorities to be ignored and sidelined.

It is clear that, when it comes to business rates, the oil and gas industry, and now roads, the SNP has turned its back on the north-east, and it is shameful. Neither warm words nor empty promises are needed, but action is. Will the minister commit today to dualling the A96 and give the communities, residents, employers and business owners the reassurance that they need that the Government is listening to them?

17:12

**Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP):** I am grateful to the Scottish Conservatives for giving us the opportunity to debate these vital matters.

For many people in the Highlands and beyond who have lost loved ones in their families—in some cases, more than one family member—and have lost friends as I and others have, as we have heard, 2022 will be their *annus horribilis*. It leaves behind the devastation of a life-long impact on their and their families’ lives. That is why I

welcome the tone that the minister has set, as this is the most serious of matters.

My theme today is the question of what the people of Scotland want from us. They want real, rapid, solid, concrete, substantial progress, and I truly believe that they do not really want politics—by that, I mean party politics and a partisan approach—because the matter is just too serious for that.

I do not, I think, need to rehearse the arguments why single carriageways are more conducive of risk than dual carriageways. The Road Safety Foundation study from years ago proves that conclusively. The fact, of which most drivers are acutely aware, is that single carriageways do not have a central reservation and therefore have nothing to reduce the velocity of head-on collisions. From 60mph each, the vehicles stop and go to zero, but the internal organs carry on at 60mph. That is why the impact and consequences of those particular incidents on single carriageways are so appalling and serious.

Mr McArthur made a number of relevant descriptive remarks. The junctions at Aviemore, Kingussie, Carrbridge and in other places are all associated with very serious incidents and deaths, and, of course, visitors to this country are unfamiliar with road laws, signs and systems.

Therefore, in the short time that I have in which to speak, I will make three asks of the minister. The first is to progress the dualling works as swiftly as possible. The second is to publish a revised plan of when the dualling commitments will be completed in respect of the A9 from Perth to Inverness and the A96 in my patch—a commitment that is enshrined in the Bute house agreement. The third—something that the minister is doing this Friday and has been doing for months, and that her predecessor, Mr Dey, also did—is to work on further safety measures that can be progressed ad interim, including improvements to lighting, signage and education. More can be done, and many of my constituents have contributed to that work.

Given the gravity of all those matters and the strength of feeling, I also ask that the Scottish Government consider making ministerial statements on each of those serious matters in due course.

In particular, I want to say that progress has been made on the A9, from Luncarty to the Pass of Birnam and from Dalraddy to Kincaig, but also on the other nine sections that are due to be dualled. In almost every case, there has been painstaking, detailed, expensive and thorough design work, preparatory work, engineering work and community engagement. Do not overlook all of that, because an enormous amount of work has

gone into that and to say that nothing has happened is simply wrong. Perhaps we need to take our trumpet out of the case and blow it a bit more, just to say what work has been done.

There are four sections—the Tay crossing to Ballinluig, Pitlochry to Killiecrankie, Glen Garry to Dalwhinnie, and Dalwhinnie to Crubenmore—on which dualling seems to be ready to go ahead. Minister, can the following questions be answered today or shortly? When will the dualling of those sections go ahead, when will that work go out for procurement, and can we have those decisions made as quickly as possible?

Presiding Officer, I think that my time is up, and I do not want to get into your bad books. I will conclude by saying that, for me, the theme today is that what the people of Scotland want is progress—real progress—not party politics.

17:17

**Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife (Green)):** I am sure that there is not a single member in the Parliament who has not been affected directly or indirectly by a tragic road accident over the years. In that spirit, I looked forward to a genuine debate about the actions that the Government can take to save lives on the A9 and the A96, from improving dangerous junctions to rolling out the use of average speed cameras. However, instead, we have seen an attempt to use recent accidents to bolster the case for dualling every inch of the A9 and the A96, without any analysis of why accident rates have worsened recently or how those accidents could have been prevented in the first place.

It is important that we go back to the basics. According to Transport Scotland, the case for the A9 dualling project was largely an economic one—it was about reducing journey times between Inverness and Perth—and the secondary benefits of reducing driver frustration and the severity, if not the frequency, of accidents came later. As members have said, there have been calls from communities along the A9 over many years to improve dangerous junctions and reduce speed.

Those priorities are reflected in the Bute house agreement, which commits the SNP and the Greens to addressing and tackling safety concerns on our roads while, at the same time, responding to community needs and delivering on our climate ambitions across Scotland. Investment should be directed where it is most needed and where it can make a real, tangible difference.

I accept that targeted improvements are needed, and, over a decade ago, I was proud to back the campaign to improve the dangerous Ballinluig junction on the A9. Every time I drive through that junction, I think back to how

dangerous it was and I think about how many lives have been saved as a result of that investment. The community in Dunkeld and Birnam still live, with a high-speed junction that is confusing and dangerous, and I back their calls for investment in a safer junction, speed reduction, better signage and other measures. I look forward to the meeting that the minister will convene with local members on those issues next week.

However, as with the original problem at Ballinluig, those problems are made even more critical because of the high speeds that vehicles travel at on dualled sections of the road. Let us not forget that the continuously dualled section of the A9 between Perth and Dunblane has also had tragic junction accidents that have required further sustained investment over many years. Simply dualling is not a panacea to address deep-seated accident and road safety issues on our roads. An evidence-led approach is required.

With the A96, the Government's review provides a chance to look afresh at what investments are genuinely needed on that corridor, including in public transport. That is embedded in the Bute house agreement. I have my doubts that that review will conclude that dualling every last inch of that road is the best option for safety for communities or for the climate.

**Fergus Ewing:** Will the member give way on that point?

**Mark Ruskell:** I am running short of time. I do not think that there is time in hand.

We need to champion measures that have already worked on the A9 and on other roads in Scotland to improve road safety. It is clear that average speed cameras save lives. On the A9, the number of fatalities fell by 40 per cent in the first three years after their introduction. Collisions were down by nearly a quarter, while frustrating road closures due to accidents were also reduced by a quarter. Therefore, it is disappointing that there has been no mention so far in the debate, or in the Tory motion, of the role of average speed cameras. I hope that the minister will reflect on their potential for the A96 in her closing speech.

The Government is right to mention the worsening financial settlement that has been handed down to the Parliament, which will limit the Government's ability to invest in the projects that we need in order to save lives. Projects to improve road safety, bypass communities or maintain roads will be threatened by the slash-and-burn austerity of the Tory party. We must have the ability to invest in genuine road safety improvements to protect lives across Scotland. That needs budget and a real focus on the measures that will actually work, backed up by the evidence.

17:22

**Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP):** I am pleased to speak in this debate and to support my colleague Fergus Ewing's call for an updated timeline for completion of dualling the A9. In him, the people of the Highlands have a great advocate and a persistent fighter on their behalf.

As has been acknowledged, it is still the case that too many lives are lost or damaged on Scotland's roads—not least on the roads in question. I am sure that members are united in expressing our condolences to everyone who has been affected.

Whenever there are significant project delays, regardless of the reason for them, there are issues of trust and confidence. Further information always adds value, so I am very grateful for the minister's earlier comments.

It is right to acknowledge all the work that has been done thus far. I am referring not only to the completion of some sections of the A9, but to the design and preparatory work that has been undertaken on all other sections that are due to be dualled, and the work on the Tomatin to Moy section—I have mentioned it previously and the minister mentioned it—which is due to be completed by 2025.

As someone who has, on occasion, travelled up the A9, I am very aware of the need to have a heightened sense of care as the road changes. No one thinks that the current stage of development is sufficient—hence the continuing commitment to complete that important work. However, we must remember that there have been huge problems with many large-scale projects in recent years as a result of the halting of so much project work because of the pandemic. I suspect that each and every MSP will, if we are honest, be able to point to delayed projects in their constituency.

There is an added financial problem, as the capital cost increases that result from inflationary pressures are compounded by supply chain problems. Such effects are very real and must be carefully addressed. Ignoring the context serves no one—least of all the people who are campaigning for projects to be completed. That is why I have regularly called for the Scottish Government to have full borrowing powers, rather than limited borrowing powers, to enable it to borrow to invest.

Recently, the UK Government has been very willing to happily borrow eye-watering sums, counted in the tens of billions, to bail it out of its own failures, while denying Scotland appropriate borrowing powers for critical capital investment. I hope that all those who want—

**Finlay Carson:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Michelle Thomson:** Absolutely—if Mr Carson can answer that point.

**Finlay Carson:** It is quite incredible that the member is making those statements. Following the union connectivity review, the UK Government made a commitment to fund improvements on the A75, which is of huge economic significance, but despite there being £20 million on the table, the Scottish Government refused to sit down with it to build the process of how the two Governments could work together.

**Michelle Thomson:** The member fails to understand the fundamental point that I am making, which is about capital borrowing powers for this Parliament—the Scottish Parliament—in which the member sits and to which he should be contributing for the Scottish people.

I hope that all those who want, for the best of reasons, to hasten capital spending on projects such as road dualling will, equally, argue for increased borrowing powers to strengthen our capacity. If anyone else wants to intervene on that point, I am willing to take the intervention.

I would very much like the minister to address two questions in his summing up. First, will he outline the major impediments to publishing a timeline for completion of dualling the A9 and A96? Secondly, what is the current state of play regarding capital funding for the projects? Let us hope that we can get them back on the road to completion.

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

17:26

**Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** The debate has shown that the case for the upgrade of the A96 and the A9 is stark. Graham Simpson reminded us of the tragic fact that more than 330 people have died on the A9 since 1979. As Murdo Fraser said, each of those deaths is a tragedy.

Fergus Ewing spoke passionately about the fact that some of the deaths on those northern roads involve several people from the same family. A week rarely goes by when we do not hear of another casualty or, tragically and all too often, another fatality.

I presume, as Neil Bibby highlighted, that that is why the SNP gave a clear manifesto commitment to dualling the A9 by 2025 and the A96 between Inverness and Aberdeen by 2030. Those deadlines—indeed, those commitments—are no longer clear. The minister was upset earlier when it was suggested that the Greens can veto SNP

commitments on roads, but if they cannot, maybe the minister will, in summing up, tell us once and for all whether the SNP's manifesto commitment to dual the A96 will be delivered and, if so, when.

The more the Government delays, the more casualties there will be on those roads. However, “dither” and “delay” have been the Government's watchwords when it comes to investment in our transport infrastructure. The late STPR2 kicked further into the long grass a host of projects that are crying out for funding. We could almost forgive the wait if the Government had shed any light on when many of those projects will happen, but the vague commitments, the lack of detail and the uncertainty have left communities across Scotland in limbo.

A number of members highlighted the fact that, just today, Anas Sarwar, Neil Bibby and I welcomed to Holyrood members of the A77 action group, council leaders and representatives of ferry firm Stena Line to brief MSPs on the need to upgrade the A75 and the A77 trunk roads. It is now vital that the Scottish Government listens to the clear message that we and the minister heard from the community and the ferry firm. If it is serious about supporting not just Wigtownshire's economy but the whole of Scotland's economy—given that the routes are the gateway to Northern Ireland—it needs to invest in making those long-forgotten roads fit for purpose. Communities there have waited long enough.

That is why Labour's amendment urges the Government to get on with the job. It must urgently publish the final STPR2 report with a clear timetable for delivering investment in those strategic active travel, ferry, bus and rail projects, and for delivering the improvements that we need to Scotland's crumbling roads, based on road safety, journey times, economic and community development and climate impact. That should not be based on behind-closed-doors deals, of which safety on the A96 has been the victim. There should be no more dithering and no more delay.

We all want—in fact, we need—fewer cars on our roads, but we cannot have an approach to roads that fails to distinguish between urban and rural and does not understand that, in rural communities in particular, a car is often a necessity and not a luxury. The delivery plan needs to include a sea change on our woeful record on electrifying car use. The Climate Change Committee estimates that we will need at least 30,000 public electric vehicle charging points in Scotland by 2030. The Government's target is for just over 4,000 in the next few years. Today, the BBC's “Disclosure” programme revealed damning evidence that almost a quarter of existing points are faulty. That is not an incentive to switch to electric vehicles.

The Government's record on public transport is certainly not going to get people out of the car and on to buses or trains. On this Government's watch, our bus network is being dismantled, route by route. Passenger numbers have fallen by 25 per cent since 2007-08, which is 121 million fewer passenger journeys, yet bus fares rise and rise and rise. They have risen by nearly 19 per cent over the past five years alone.

In 2019, I lodged amendments to the Transport (Scotland) Bill to give councils the power to run their own buses. Three years on, they still have no guidance or funding to establish those bus services to put passengers, not profits, first. More dither, more delay.

The Government's record on trains is, sadly, no better. In 2014, when it handed the keys of Scotland's trains to Dutch firm Abellio, the SNP promised that our rail system would be world leading. Well, it certainly did lead the world, but on fare rises, delays and cancellations. Now the Government has cut the number of trains per day by one third—250 per day—from pre-pandemic levels.

On active travel, the Government failed to reach its 2020 target to increase the share of everyday journeys that are made by bike to 10 per cent. In fact, that year, it was only 2 per cent.

Transport remains the largest source of climate emissions at nearly 29 per cent, most of which is from cars. That is why Labour's amendment focuses on reversing this Government's woeful record on public transport. However, we also recognise that, without strategic investment and improvement of our key trunk roads—whether the A96 and the A9 in the north or the A75 and A77 in the south—Scotland's economy and our poor safety record will continue to fail Scotland.

17:31

**The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights (Patrick Harvie):** As many members have done, I begin by expressing my sympathies to everyone who has been affected either by the loss of a loved one or by injury on our roads over this year.

As the Minister for Transport said, the accidents on the trunk roads, in particular, that members have been discussing are deeply tragic for everyone. Our road safety framework to 2030 sets out ambitious targets to reduce the number of accidents, and we are absolutely determined to deliver on those. That will require us to address the recent upturn in the number of accidents on the A9 while we continue to invest in the safety of our wider network and promote safety for everyone who uses it, the communities that it

serves, and the businesses, services and individuals who rely on it.

That will require on-going investment to support a wide range of outcomes—reducing death and injury on our roads, of course, but also improving safety for communities and reducing the terrible loss that families, friends and individuals suffer whenever a loved one is lost, whether they are a driver, a pedestrian, a cyclist or anyone else.

Road safety, every bit as much as the climate emergency, demands of us a change in approach to transport after decades of rising road traffic volumes, with all the additional risk and the environmental damage that comes as a direct result.

**Brian Whittle:** Will the minister give way?

**Patrick Harvie:** I do not have time for many interventions, but I will give way to Brian Whittle.

**Brian Whittle:** I am grateful to the minister for giving way. Given the issues in both rural and urban contexts, I wonder whether the minister is against any kind of road development, particularly hydrogen-electric superhighways that could perhaps connect our rural and urban economies.

**Patrick Harvie:** Perhaps on another occasion we will get into a discussion about the role of hydrogen and whether transport is its most likely sustainable use. However, of course there are differences between urban and rural contexts, whatever the fuel source that is being used.

Over the course of the debate, I have listened carefully to the arguments on progress with the dualling works on the A9 between Perth and Inverness and improvements on the A96 corridor. It is important to recognise that the Government is delivering exactly what we said we would when the shared policy programme was published.

**Edward Mountain:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Patrick Harvie:** In a moment; I will first make some progress.

As committed to in the shared policy programme, the A9 programme between Perth and Inverness is being taken forward subject to the normal statutory authorisation and business case processes.

**Graham Simpson:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Patrick Harvie:** I am about to turn to some of Mr Simpson's comments, so let me make a little progress.

Road safety is about more than road design, and increased capacity is certainly no guarantee of better safety. Although the transport minister

was right to say that the Conservative motion strikes a respectful tone, I genuinely wish that that was true of all the speeches that we heard, some of which appeared to be more interested in party-political point scoring or name calling than in dealing with genuinely serious road safety issues.

Mr Simpson recognised that different reasons exist for all accidents. That is true, but his focus was on one intervention only—dualling. He had little to say on issues around reducing road speed, reducing traffic volume, addressing driver behaviour or the very positive role that cameras can play, as Mr Ruskell mentioned—in fact, very few members did. In what should be a serious debate about road safety, Mr Simpson seemed more interested in slightly cartoonish imagined conversations between people whose politics he disagrees with.

**Graham Simpson:** It is obvious that the minister did not hear my intervention on the transport minister, where I welcomed some of the short-term measures that she will carry out. The transport minister says that she is fully committed to dualling the A9 and A96. Is he?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Minister, you have one minute left.

**Patrick Harvie:** I am fully committed to what we published in the Bute house agreement, which is a commitment to the north and north-east, including improvements on the A96 corridor. We have made it very clear that the current plan is to fully dual the A96, but at the same time, a transparent evidence-based review that includes a climate compatibility assessment to consider the direct and indirect impacts on climate and the environment must and will be conducted. I would have hoped that any political party that wills the end, by voting for ambitious climate targets, is also prepared to will the means, and will support us taking forward that work.

There is not enough time to address all the many issues that I wanted to discuss, but I genuinely hope that members in discussing these issues will focus on all the aspects of road safety that need to be taken forward, including the need to reduce traffic speeds and traffic volumes, achieve a modal shift to public and active travel and recognise that many people who are vulnerable to issues around road safety need protection when they use active travel. There is a huge amount that we need to get right, and the Government is committed to doing that as part of our road safety framework. I support the amendment in Jenny Gilruth's name.

17:38

**Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** Perhaps the most telling aspect of the debate

happened yesterday evening, as it was being set up. The motion in Graham Simpson's name demands that Parliament

“notes with alarm the number of recent fatalities on the A9 and A96”

and demands a timetable for the fulfilment of the promise to dual them. However, as Graham Simpson pointed out, the amendment in the name of Jenny Gilruth makes no mention at all of the promises to dual either road. Coupled with what we have heard today from the Scottish Government and its Green partners, the people of the north and north-east will no doubt draw the inevitable conclusions.

We heard from many speakers that the accident statistics on the A9 and A96 are truly horrific, and I particularly note Fergus Ewing's passionate and moving contribution in that regard. Douglas Lumsden told us that since 2019 there have been 11 fatal accidents on the A9, resulting in 13 deaths, and that 164 people were injured in 94 non-fatal accidents. Between January and August this year, 30 people have been injured—nine seriously—in crashes on that road, and one person died.

In a powerful contribution from Murdo Fraser, we heard that the A9 has the unenviable reputation of being Scotland's most dangerous road.

Between 2018 and 2021, 21 people have been killed and 257 injured. This year alone 14 people have lost their lives, which is the highest number for 12 years. Murdo Fraser told us that 12 of those accidents were on single-carriageway sections.

**Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** A month ago, I attended the funeral of a friend who tragically died in a road accident on the A9 in September, and the sorrow that every fatality brings for the families and close friends of people involved is simply impossible to describe. Does Liam Kerr agree that the Scottish Government needs to take swifter action not only on the A9 but on other roads in the Highlands and Islands, such as the A83 at the Rest and Be Thankful, which have not yet seen fatalities but have seen serious accidents and remain perilously dangerous?

**Liam Kerr:** Yes, I do. I thank Donald Cameron for the intervention and give my condolences to him and to all who have lost friends, family and acquaintances for their loss—every one is a tragedy. He is right about taking wider action. I strongly agree with that.

We heard from Finlay Carson about the importance of action finally happening on the A77 and A75, and I echo that. Craig Hoy made a similar, important, intervention about the A1 and Sheriffhall.



In the interest of time, I will be brief in acknowledging the economic aspect of this. We heard from Douglas Lumsden how Liz Cameron, the chief executive of the Scottish Chambers of Commerce, said that a dualled A96 would unlock

“economic growth, workforce mobility and investment,”

and Douglas Ross intervened to talk of Moray Chamber of Commerce’s survey, which found that dualling would benefit business and the economy locally.

More failures to honour promises are unforgivable. Those are breaches of promises, because—as we heard from Graham Simpson—in 2011 the Scottish Government’s infrastructure investment plan promised to dual the A96 in full, and to dual the road from Perth to Inverness by 2025 in full, yet only two out of 11 sections of the A9 have been done to date. All we have on the A96 is a four-week consultation on whether to dual it, which has cost nearly £2 million and—as we heard—got fewer than 5,000 responses. What a waste of taxpayers’ money. We know what the people want, yet this consultation will not even reveal what the people want, because although the minister claims that it is “evidence based”, of the 100 questions, not one asked about dualling the A96. There are plenty of questions about how old people’s vehicles are, what mode of transport they use and how good they feel the active travel options are in their area. It is little wonder that Stewart Nicol, chief executive of the Inverness Chamber of Commerce, suggested in July that it had been “skewed” to ensure that it gave the result that the SNP-Green coalition wanted.

Further, when, as Graham Simpson reminded us, Maggie Chapman said more than a year ago that the survey was going to be very clear that it

“actually isn’t viable to dual the whole way”,

a cynic might suggest that she was only reflecting what the Scottish Government had already decided to conclude. Also, given Mr Ewing’s comments in summer 2021 that

“support is forthcoming from all but one party, which attracted little support”

it is clear that a handful of MSPs, who attracted a tiny number of votes, are capable of holding any manifesto commitment to ransom, so long as they are nationalists.

It is abundantly clear from this consultation that the SNP Government wants to kick the upgrade into the long grass and find any excuse to breach its promise on the A96, just as it breached it on the A9.

Earlier this month, Badenoch and Strathspey ward councillor Bill Lobban described the death toll in his ward as “catastrophic”. He went on to say:

“How we tell the people left behind that we could do something about this and we didn’t, is something we have got to live with ... this is more important than money.”

That is indeed so.

More than a decade has gone by since the SNP promised to dual the A96—promise broken. The A9 was promised to be completed by 2025—promise broken. It is time for the SNP to stop pandering to its Green partners and get on with these life-saving improvements and dual the A96 and the A9 in full. The families of those killed and injured deserve nothing less.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes the debate on essential road improvements. It is now time to move on to the next item of business.

**Jenny Gilruth:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. During the debate, Douglas Ross made mention of a letter that I had received from Moray Chamber of Commerce on 21 September in relation to the A96. I want to put it on record that a response was issued from our parliamentary office on 18 October to Sarah Medcraf, the chief executive of the chamber. I would be grateful if the *Official Report* could be updated accordingly.

**Douglas Ross:** Further to that point of order, Presiding Officer.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I will deal first with the first point of order, Mr Ross.

That is not really a matter for the chair, but the minister has made her point, which will obviously be reported in the *Official Report*.

I will now hear the next point of order, from Douglas Ross.

**Douglas Ross:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Sarah Medcraf told me earlier this afternoon that no response from the Scottish Government had been received. Perhaps the minister could go back to her officials to ensure that a response has gone to Moray Chamber of Commerce.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Again, that is not a matter for the chair, but the member has made a request for clarification, and I am sure that the minister has noted it.

## Business Motion

17:45

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-06563, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 8 November 2022

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Future Agriculture Support and Food Security in Scotland

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: National Planning Framework 4

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: Remembrance Commemorations and Support for the Veterans and Armed Forces Community

*followed by* Committee Announcements

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 9 November 2022

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:  
Rural Affairs and Islands;  
Health and Social Care

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: Forestry's Contribution to Net Zero Scotland

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 10 November 2022

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

*followed by* Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:  
Social Justice, Housing and Local

Government

*followed by* Health, Social Care and Sport Committee Debate: Inquiry into Alternative Pathways to Primary Care

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 15 November 2022

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

*followed by* Scottish Government Business

*followed by* Committee Announcements

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 16 November 2022

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:  
Constitution, External Affairs and Culture;  
Justice and Veterans

*followed by* Scottish Government Business

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 17 November 2022

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

*followed by* Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:  
Education and Skills

*followed by* Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee Debate: The Impact of Brexit on Devolution

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 7 November 2022, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted.—[George Adam]

*Motion agreed to.*

## Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:46

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motions S6M-06564, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, and S6M-06565, on the designation of a lead committee.

*Motions moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Biometrics Commissioner Act 2020 (Code of Practice) (Appointed Day) (Scotland) Regulations 2022 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Criminal Justice Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the legislative consent memorandum in relation to the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill (UK Legislation).—[*George Adam*]

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

## Decision Time

17:46

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** There are seven questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Kevin Stewart is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Jackie Baillie will fall by way of pre-emption.

The first question is, that amendment S6M-06523.3, in the name of Kevin Stewart, which seeks to amend motion S6M-06523, in the name of Craig Hoy, on national care service viability, 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.

17:47

*Meeting suspended.*

17:49

*On resuming—*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Kevin Stewart is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Jackie Baillie will fall. The question is, that amendment S6M-06523.3, in the name of Kevin Stewart, be agreed to. Members should cast their votes now.

**For**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)

Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

#### Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 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 amendment S6M-06523.3, in the name of Kevin Stewart, is: For 62, Against 49, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S6M-06523, in the name of Craig Hoy, on national care service viability, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

The vote is now closed.

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app appears to have frozen. I would have voted yes.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you. We will ensure that that is recorded.

**The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands (Mairi Gougeon):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I had exactly the same problem as Shirley-Anne Somerville, and my page would not connect. I would have voted yes.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you. Your vote will be recorded.

**The Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care (Kevin Stewart):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I am not sure whether my vote was recorded. I would have voted yes.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I understand that your vote was recorded, Mr Stewart.

**Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I voted no and tried to change it to yes, but my screen froze. I should have voted yes.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Ms Callaghan, but you cannot actually change your vote in those circumstances.

**For**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

**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)  
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 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-06523, in the name of Craig Hoy, on national care service viability, as amended, is: For 61, Against 50, Abstentions 0.

*Motion, as amended, agreed to,*

That the Parliament notes that the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic highlights the imperative for the National Care Service (NCS) to end the postcode lottery in the provision of adult social care; believes that there must be a rights-based, user-led approach to social care with consistent and fair access to high-quality care and support; further believes that the NCS should embed ethical commissioning that promotes fair work and climate change ambitions; recognises that the key consideration is how improvements are made for people who rely on the services of the NCS; welcomes that the NCS will be shaped by co-design and that services will be delivered locally; supports the creation, in line with the

recommendation of the Independent Review of Adult Social Care, of a system of national collective bargaining on pay, terms and conditions within the social care sector and for workforce representatives, such as trade unions, to be involved in the governance of the service, including through full membership of Local Care Boards; notes that, in establishing the NCS, including any transfer of financial resources from local authorities to reformed integration boards, the Scottish Government should take into consideration the impact on local authorities' ability to resource and deliver other services; understands that the UK Government's mismanagement of the economy has heaped more pressure on care providers who were already adversely affected by the consequences of Brexit, and recognises the importance of local authorities, health boards, and the Scottish Government working constructively together to deliver improvements to social care in the interim, while mitigating the impact of the UK Government's actions.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S6M-06520.2, in the name of Jenny Gilruth, which seeks to amend motion S6M-06520, in the name of Graham Simpson, on essential road improvements, 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)  
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)

Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

#### Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)

Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

#### Abstentions

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

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S6M-06520.2, in the name of Jenny Gilruth, is: For 62, Against 47, Abstentions 2.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S6M-06520.1, in the name of Neil Bibby, which seeks to amend motion S6M-06520, in the name of Graham Simpson, on essential road improvements, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

#### For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)

Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)

Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley)  
(SNP)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S6M-06520.1, in the name of Neil Bibby, is: For 49, Against 61, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The question is, that motion S6M-06520, in the name of Graham Simpson, on essential road improvements, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

The vote is now closed.

**Kevin Stewart:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I do not know what is happening with the app this afternoon, but I would have voted yes.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Stewart. Again, your vote was recorded.

#### For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
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)  
Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (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)  
Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)

Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse)  
(SNP)  
McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)  
McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine)  
(SNP)  
O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley)  
(SNP)  
Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

#### Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)  
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire)  
(Con)  
Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)



Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on motion S6M-06520, in the name of Graham Simpson, on essential road improvements, as amended, is: For 82, Against 28, Abstentions 0.

*Motion, as amended, agreed to,*

That the Parliament notes with alarm the number of recent fatalities on the A9 and A96; recognises the pain that these tragedies have caused families; and indeed the pain caused by all fatalities and serious accidents across Scotland's road network; acknowledges that Transport Scotland is working with Police Scotland and partner agencies to understand the circumstances of recent accidents; notes that, as investigations continue, it would be inappropriate for the Parliament to comment on individual cases further; agrees that road safety is paramount and, while the Scottish Government is investing record amounts in road safety to help meet the long-term goal of zero fatalities and injuries on Scotland's roads by 2050, there is more to do with short-term measures to address specific safety issues on trunk roads like the A9 and A96; acknowledges the investment of £400 million to date for dualling the A9 between Perth and Inverness and that work is continuing across the A9, and notes the Scottish Government's commitment to take forward a transport enhancements programme on the A96 corridor and that the review of the programme to fully dual the A96 will report by the end of the year.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I propose to ask a single question on two Parliamentary Bureau motions. Does any member object?

As no member objects, the final question is, that motion S6M-06564, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, and motion S6M-06565, on the designation of a lead committee, be agreed to.

*Motions agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Biometrics Commissioner Act 2020 (Code of Practice) (Appointed Day) (Scotland) Regulations 2022 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Criminal Justice Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the legislative consent memorandum in relation to the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill (UK Legislation).

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes decision time. We will move on to the next item of business. I ask members who are leaving the chamber to do so quickly and quietly.

## Western Isles Interconnector

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-06111, in the name of Alasdair Allan, on a Western Isles interconnector. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

*Motion debated,*

That the Parliament welcomes the recent National Grid Electricity System Operator report, *Pathway to 2030 Holistic Network Design*, and the inclusion of a new 1.8GW interconnector to connect the Western Isles, which has been assessed as "required" to deliver 2030 offshore wind targets; understands that this new link is expected to have sufficient capacity to accommodate all known onshore wind contracted to connect in the Western Isles as well as the two ScotWind sites in closest proximity to the islands; welcomes the transformational economic impacts that investment in renewables and grid infrastructure will reportedly have on the Western Isles and Scottish economies; recognises what it sees as the significant contribution this investment will make towards net zero targets and securing Scotland's future energy independence and energy security; notes with concern that the new link was not included in the energy regulator, Ofgem's, recent consultation on accelerating onshore electricity transmission investment, and notes calls for Ofgem to ensure this new link is included in its final list of projects approved for accelerated investment, which is due to be published before the end of 2022.

18:03

**Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP):** I thank members who signed the motion for the debate. I appreciate that, at first glance, this topic may appear to be niche or islands-centric. If it is, I offer little by way of apology for that. Whether the Western Isles interconnector goes ahead will, in fact, have a profound impact on Scotland's ability to reach net zero and to play our part in the global fight against climate change.

I recognise the wide array of support that the project attracts. Locally, it is an issue that has the backing of the member of the United Kingdom Parliament, the MSP and the local authority, and the Scottish Government has played an important role over the years in trying to move the project on. All the parties that are represented in the chamber can justifiably claim to have played a role in supporting it, so I very much hope that we hear some of that support tonight.

Most important is that the need for the interconnector is recognised and accepted by the communities that I represent. The lighthouse at the Butt of Lewis has a mention in the Guinness books of world records for being the windiest place in the United Kingdom, and for generations, the wind in Scotland was something to be endured rather than harnessed. Now, with the renewables revolution, we have a huge development

opportunity right on our doorstep. Renewables developments are capable of bringing to the islands substantial socioeconomic benefits, which we desperately need.

The islands that I represent are, by and large, economically fragile. The industries on which we have traditionally relied, including textiles, fishing and crofting, have faced challenges in recent decades. The public sector is by far the largest employer, which leaves us vulnerable through prolonged periods of UK austerity such as we are living through now. The greatest challenge that we face in the coming years is in tackling the dual problems of depopulation and having an ageing population.

The construction of a transmission link would unlock hundreds of millions of pounds' worth of investment from shovel-ready renewables projects across the islands. It is anticipated that a sizeable number of jobs and millions of pounds' worth of contracts for the local economy would be created during the construction phase. The community benefit funds that developers have pledged to establish would also bring in much-needed revenue.

It is worth noting that the Western Isles are at the forefront of Scotland's drive to empower communities and to enable them to make decisions about their own areas. Community-owned land covers nearly half the land area and contains 70 per cent of our population. Community trusts have a key part to play in building stronger and more sustainable communities, and many have done so by establishing their own renewables projects. Indeed, community energy in the Western Isles has thrived. Substantial sums of money are brought directly into the community every year for important projects that deal with issues such as fuel poverty, housing, employment and additional community services.

There is, therefore, a real need for an interconnector. The history of the project stretches back over nearly two decades. There is—members will be glad to know—not enough time tonight for me to cover the whole story, but there have been many false dawns and broken promises. When there has been progress, it has felt painfully slow, and a step forward has always seemed to precede at least one step back.

In recent years, with the Scottish Government's support, it has felt like momentum has built on the issue and it has been going in the right direction. In 2017, the UK Government reintroduced support for remote island wind, and 400MW of onshore wind in the Western Isles secured support through the contracts for difference auctions in the 2019 and 2022 rounds. However, in 2019, the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets rejected a Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks proposal for a

600MW link, and instead proposed a smaller 450MW connection that would have made projects unviable for developers. For the sake of a cost difference of less than 5 per cent, the larger link was rejected.

The need for enhanced grid infrastructure for the ScotWind offshore developments has breathed new life into the case for the interconnector. SSEN has been developing plans for a substantially bigger 1.8GW link, which would have sufficient capacity to accommodate all currently contracted onshore wind sites in the Western Isles and offshore wind in proximity to the Western Isles, with additional headroom for—I hope—future projects.

All that brings us to the latest point in the saga, and the real reason for tonight's debate. In August, Ofgem consulted on how it could support accelerated delivery of the strategic electricity transmission network upgrades that are needed to meet the UK Government's 2030 renewable electricity generation ambitions. Despite the 1.8GW transmission link meeting all the criteria, it was omitted from the consultation document's list of projects, which means that investment in the project continues to be stalled.

I believe that this project is of national significance, that the Western Isles have an enormous role to play in Scotland's renewables landscape in the coming decades and that the Western Isles transmission link is urgently needed in order to unlock that potential. However, I do not believe that those who have the power to do the unlocking—Ofgem and the UK Government—have treated the issue accordingly. Ofgem has a chance to change that by ensuring that the Western Isles transmission link is included in its final list of projects that are approved for accelerated investment, which is to be published at the end of this year. I hope that members will join me in calling on Ofgem to do just that.

18:09

**Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** My colleague Alasdair Allan has my complete support in seeking a new interconnector for the Western Isles, which is one of many actions that Ofgem needs to take, but is not yet taking, in order to serve our constituents to even the most minimal standard. I appreciate his comments about the perception that it is a niche issue, but he and I both know that the situation is one of many indications of an ever-present and increasingly serious issue that has far-reaching consequences.

Since I was elected last May, I have spent a considerable amount of my time feeling concerned and frustrated by failures in UK energy policy.

There is massive potential in my region—all sorts of potential, although I am, this evening, referring specifically to renewable energy potential—but UK energy policy continues to disadvantage the Highlands and Islands. It penalises us for providing clean green energy to the rest of the country, and it charges us more for the energy that we use, with Ofgem even implementing as-yet-unexplained higher standing charges for my constituents. If the goal is to tackle climate change, it does not make sense to leave our islands behind.

My region is leading the way in innovation and in finding community solutions to energy concerns. Earlier this year, I was honoured to host the University of the Highlands and Islands in the Parliament for an event about the research in energy that is being done in the university. Development of our region, which is rich in national resources, for the better requires being up close and familiar with it, and it requires real understanding of what its potential means to our people personally, as well as an understanding of how policy will ensure—or jeopardise—the continued existence of rural and island communities. It is hard to overstate the importance of a university that has skin in the game taking the lead on bringing us into a future in which we can lead—not only in Scotland, but globally—on tidal, wind and wave energy technologies.

Our unique environment deserves nothing less than people who are not only willing, but excited, to research where the resource is. That knowledge can then be shared. As we have seen from the international interest in the UHI's work, people around the world are screaming out for the lessons that only the Highlands and Islands can teach.

My constituents often raise with me the unfairness of their being surrounded by green energy development while they face insurmountable fuel bills and are forced into poverty or away from their homes. It is a fair question, and it is another question that UHI research will be key to answering, if and when the powers that are needed to make changes to energy policy are given to Scotland. Investigations into how communities perceive renewables projects, and exploration of the community benefit that could be gained through local projects, will provide the fundamentals to ensure that we can build a system that means that the benefit of the work that is done, and of the energy that is generated in the region, is felt within the region.

As the Scottish National Party MP Stephen Flynn has said, we have the energy; we need the power. It is unforgivable that the Tory UK Government is preventing us from reaching our massive potential, and is instead frequently

leaving many of my constituents in fuel poverty. We need powers over energy policy and full powers over social security in Scotland, but it is pretty clear that the UK Government does not want to give us those powers, so we need independence.

18:12

**Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I refer members to my entry in respect of renewable energy in my register of interests. I apologise for having to leave the debate early this evening.

I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate. I put on the record my continued support for the Western Isles' bid to secure a subsea interconnector cable, and I thank Alasdair Allan for bringing the debate to the chamber. I am always keen to take part in niche islands debates, and this is one of them.

Having made representations on the issue in one form or another since I was first elected in 2016, I know that—as Alasdair Allan said—there is widespread support for an interconnector, and I acknowledge the cross-party support that he mentioned. I share his frustrations that we are still talking about the interconnector, rather than seeing its delivery. It is, as he described it, a “saga”.

It was deeply disappointing when Ofgem rejected the initial proposal for a 600MW transmission link back in 2019. That said, I welcome the fact that the latest proposal would treble the capacity of the link to 1.8GW, and that National Grid Electricity System Operator's “Pathway to 2030 Holistic Network Design” report has assessed the project as “essential” and “required” to deliver 2030 offshore wind targets. In April, the UK Government announced a boost to the UK's previous target to deliver up to 40GW of offshore wind, by increasing it to delivery of 50GW by 2030.

Those are positive developments, but I also acknowledge that Ofgem is, once again, the issue, as it failed to include the proposals in its recent consultation on accelerating onshore electricity transmission investment. Ofgem is independent of the UK Government, and I believe that it is Ofgem, and not the UK Government, that is the object of frustration. It is very regrettable that Ofgem rejected the proposal in 2019.

As Alasdair Allan mentioned, there was a specific manifesto commitment from my party in 2017 to

“support the development of wind projects in the remote islands of Scotland, where they will directly benefit local communities.”

Given the current cost of living crisis, fluctuations in the global energy market and the on-going instability in Russia and elsewhere, it is imperative that we in Scotland and the United Kingdom continue the drive towards energy independence. Projects such as the 1.8GW transmission link to the Western Isles will unlock significant grid capacity, as well as reducing our reliance on fossil fuels for energy.

Crucially, any new wind project, whether onshore or offshore, must have community backing and result in long-standing benefits for people who live in the Western Isles. The various local groups that I have spoken to during visits to the Western Isles over the years have consistently emphasised that point.

In saying that, I know that support for an interconnector and the wind projects that come with that is not universal—it would be wrong not to acknowledge that. There are differences of opinion within crofting communities about the structure and arrangement of community benefits from renewable energy, and we must recognise those. That is why I believe that, as we seek to harness the untapped energy that the Western Isles can provide, people on the ground must see the benefits through greater investment in local infrastructure and community projects.

We all agree that there is a robust case for a new 1.8GW interconnector to connect the Western Isles. We, alongside community representatives, must make that case to Ofgem in order to realise that long-standing ambition. I call on Ofgem to include the bid in its final list of projects for accelerated investment, because of the benefits that it will bring to the Western Isles, to Scotland and to the whole of the United Kingdom.

18:16

**Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab):** As niche debates go, this one is probably about as niche as it could be. I say that as a member for South Scotland and because I am giving this speech on behalf of my colleague Rhoda Grant, who cannot be here although she wanted to be.

I congratulate Alasdair Allan on securing the debate. It has long been recognised that the Western Isles have the ability to be a national source of renewable energy: weather patterns make that so. However, we have been unable to source that energy because of grid restrictions. Ofgem wasted time arguing that Scottish Hydro Electric Transmission Ltd's proposed interconnector was too large for what was required, and would only consent to an interconnector of any capacity if it had already received planning permission. Ofgem refused to listen to arguments showing that, if the

interconnector was built with spare capacity, that capacity would be snapped up.

The islands are made up of a large number of community-owned estates, which cannot afford to tie up capital for years in projects that might never come off. Therefore, their renewable energy ambitions are not yet going through the planning process—they cannot do so without the guarantee of transmission. However, if there was capacity in the grid, those groups would build onshore turbines. Those projects are shovel ready.

Ofgem previously insisted on a smaller capacity interconnector, which would have led to no community benefit. While that argument was going on, the ScotWind leasing process took place, resulting in the leasing of areas west of the islands for offshore wind. Now, suddenly, there is another delay, because the proposed interconnector is deemed to be not big enough. There is frustration. Ofgem has been told all this before, but it would not listen, and we now face further delays and increasing costs.

Meanwhile, the islands' community-owned estates are being starved of much-needed income. Imagine what that investment would bring. It would transform those economies, but, yet again, it appears that Ofgem acts only in the interests of multinational energy companies and not in the interests of the people who live and work on the islands.

I welcome the commitment to a future-proofed interconnector, but regret that it has taken so long and that there has been so much delay. It is disappointing that the proposal is not included in the Ofgem accelerated strategic transmission investment framework. It is the only link in the National Grid ESO's holistic network design that has not been included. It is therefore critical for Ofgem to change its position and ensure that the 1.8GW Western Isles link is included in its decision on the ASTI framework, which is due by the end of this year.

We saw what happened when the subsea cable from Skye failed: islands became dependent on diesel generators for electricity. That is frustrating because our islands have the ability to remove carbon from the grid for everyone.

I urge the Scottish Government to make every effort to progress this interconnector.

18:20

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests, as I am in receipt of the feed-in tariff and renewable heat incentive. I pass on my best wishes to my friend and our colleague Rhoda Grant.

I thank Alasdair Allan for lodging the motion; he knows that I stand shoulder to shoulder with him on bringing any and all island issues to the chamber—the more niche the better. However, we are due a wrestle to the death over whether Orkney or the Western Isles are the windiest of our islands.

The issue of interconnectors to our islands has been around for some time. I agreed to speak in the debate with some trepidation, because the delivery of an interconnector has been seen as, “The Western Isles’ gain might be Orkney or Shetland’s pain.” We are beyond that now—as Alasdair Allan said, it is patently obvious that it will require all our islands to meet their full potential in the delivery of renewables if we are to achieve our renewables and net zero targets.

The story that we have heard about the Western Isles interconnector is reflected in the story that surrounds the attempts to get an interconnector to Orkney. In 2019, the needs case for a 220kW link was made, which Ofgem accepted, but only subject to some arbitrary and pretty excessive conditions. Despite the cost benefit analysis from Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks, which indicated that projects generating around 70MW or 80MW were required in order to justify that sort of investment, Ofgem came back with a figure of around 135MW, which seems excessive.

Ofgem’s timetable also seemed far tighter and more stringent than was necessary. That timetable has been elongated a bit, largely due to the restrictions imposed by Covid. However, it does not suggest an approach that encourages the development of renewables in our islands.

The Parliament takes pride, quite rightly, in our world-leading legislation on climate change, although we are all seized of the fact that the delivery of the legislation will be far more difficult than the passing of it. The fulfilling of our renewables potential can only be achieved through our islands being able to play their full part, which will require interconnectors, regardless of what happens in relation to storage and the development of other technologies.

It is largely Ofgem, rather than the UK Government, that needs to reflect far more. There are indeed issues of energy cost for consumers and around the security of supply. However, the project is also integral to achieving our net zero targets, and Ofgem’s approach to that balance of statutory duties needs a bit of a refresh.

I caution Emma Roddick on drawing this into a debate around the constitution. I do not think that the break-up of the UK or the fragmentation of the energy market—not something that anybody in the energy sector is really arguing for—would help. There is cross-party support for the delivery of

interconnectors, not just to the Western Isles but to all our islands, so that we can achieve our net zero targets and allow our islands to fulfil their potential.

I commit to playing my part in the continuation of that cross-party consensus on the issue, and I look forward to hearing what the minister has to say.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Patrick Harvie to respond on behalf of the Scottish Government.

18:24

**The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants’ Rights (Patrick Harvie):** Even if it is a niche debate, it is an extremely important niche. Not everyone is drawn to the slightly more technical aspects of such an issue, but the realisation of the project to which Alasdair Allan has drawn our attention will benefit huge numbers of people across Scotland, in particular in communities such as those that he represents.

Scotland has a long and positive history of harnessing renewable energy, and our capacity to generate it will have to increase to meet our climate change targets. Increased electrification and deployment of renewables to meet expected growth in demand will require significant investment in our electricity infrastructure, in order to maintain resilience and increase transfer capability between Scotland and the rest of the Great Britain market, as well as to meet our own increased needs.

As Liam McArthur says, our island communities, including those that Alasdair Allan represents, have a critical role to play in that, so of course we welcome the inclusion in National Grid ESO’s report, “Pathway to 2030—Holistic Network Design” of a new 1.8GW transmission line to connect the Western Isles. Alasdair Allan, in bringing the motion to the chamber, is quite right to highlight—as other members have done—that expectations are now on Ofgem to ensure that the project goes ahead.

The proposed line will accommodate the renewable energy generated from all known onshore and offshore wind in and around the Western Isles. That is a significant and important step, which will be key to enabling Scotland’s transition to net zero, as well as supporting long-term energy security.

We are well on the road to fully decarbonising our electricity system in Scotland, but it is vital that we continue to work together to enable all of those critical investments, while making sure that regulatory levers continue to drive down costs and

increase benefits for energy customers as well as communities.

We must not repeat the mistakes of the past. We must ensure a managed and fair transition to net zero. That is why we will work collaboratively with the regulator, the UK Government and communities and industry to secure that just transition and harness opportunities across all sectors to build a better and more equal Scotland. However, we can do that only if the necessary infrastructure is in place to meet our growing renewable energy generating capacity.

As we move towards a net zero society, the electrification of heat and transport will increase our demand for electricity. It is vital that that demand is met by renewables and flexible solutions, rather than by fossil fuels and nuclear generation. Taking advantage of our extensive offshore wind resource will enable us to do that, but there must be a means to transport that power to where it is needed. Heat in buildings, for example, accounts for 20 per cent of Scotland's greenhouse gas emissions. The climate change plan envelope for buildings, and our heat in buildings strategy, require more than 1 million on-gas homes to convert to zero emissions heat by the end of this decade, and for emissions from homes and buildings to fall by 68 per cent over the same period.

I visited the Western Isles back in May and heard directly from people there about the challenges of decarbonising homes and buildings on the islands. Changing how we heat our homes and use energy in our homes and buildings is fundamentally about addressing climate change, but it can also strengthen our energy security and, if we get the details right, can represent a stepping stone toward not just a greener but a fairer Scotland for everyone. That is why we have committed to continuing to make our homes more energy efficient and to decarbonise heat, with at least £1.8 billion being made available during the course of this session of Parliament.

Although the Scottish Government does not have the power to mandate community benefits, we expect delivery partners of the transmission link to work with local communities and ensure that they share in the benefits of the project.

Our seas are home to some of the best offshore wind resources in the world, and Scotland's ambition to capitalise on our offshore wind generation capacity is part of the bold action that we are taking to become a net zero society. I am aware that projects in Scottish waters are at a competitive disadvantage compared to projects further south as a result of the more challenging conditions and the higher transmission costs. We are actively engaged in the offshore transmission network review to consider how the offshore

transmission network is designed and delivered here in Scotland.

The decisions and actions that we take now will shape the Scotland that future generations live and work in. Recognising the undeniable benefits to our economy, the Scottish Government has consistently provided a supportive environment for both offshore and onshore wind over the past decade.

The Scottish ministers have made it clear time and again that we will use every lever at our disposal to maximise the wider economic returns for Scotland from the wind sector. ScotWind is the world's largest commercial leasing round for floating offshore wind and puts Scotland at the forefront of offshore wind development globally. Together with the option fees for the clearing round, ScotWind will deliver more than £700 million in revenues to the public purse for the initial awards alone.

The Scottish ministers are considering how the ScotWind revenue should be invested to maximise the benefits for the people of Scotland. In addition, ScotWind will deliver several billion pounds more in rental revenues when projects become operational. That, too, will be invested for the benefit of the people of Scotland.

**Liam McArthur:** I do not want to sound a discordant note but I simply observe that ScotWind appears to be the exception to commitments that the Scottish Government has previously made about the revenues from sea bed assets transferring to local authorities. The financial impact that that is having on communities such as Orkney is significant. I ask the Scottish Government to reflect on that.

**Patrick Harvie:** I am happy, as I am sure fellow ministers will be, to explore those issues further with Mr McArthur. Far from sounding a discordant note, I hope that all members recognise that ScotWind promises to be transformational in delivering economic supply chain benefits as well as a huge amount of renewable electricity generation.

We welcome the commitment of developers to invest an average of £1.4 billion in Scotland per project. That equates to more than £28 billion across the 20 ScotWind offshore wind projects. The two ScotWind projects that are in close proximity to the Western Isles are no exception. The 1.8GW link marks a major step forward in unlocking the renewable potential of the islands. Although we share the disappointment that has been expressed about the delay to the planned 600MW interconnector, we welcome the news that the interconnector that National Grid ESO now states as being required will be significantly larger than originally planned and will accommodate the

energy generated from all known onshore and offshore wind in and around the Western Isles.

The timescale for such multimillion-pound projects has slipped in the past and the Scottish Government will continue to seek assurances that the interconnector will now progress swiftly and without further delay. Final investment will be subject to Ofgem approval and necessary planning consent. As Alasdair Allan did in his opening speech, we continue to call on Ofgem to ensure that the new 1.8GW interconnector is included in its final list of projects approved for accelerated development.

We strongly encourage National Grid ESO to explore all avenues to accelerate the timelines for our other ScotWind projects. We are pleased that it has announced its intention to progress with a transmission entry capacity amnesty, which might help to free up transmission capacity that is being held for some legacy projects that are not progressing.

Scotland's long and positive association with renewables continues to go from strength to strength. It is central to our green recovery. In 2021, Scotland generated enough renewable electricity to power all households here for almost three years. That is a huge achievement.

We recognise the importance of energy generated in the Western Isles in contributing to the decarbonisation of Scotland's energy supply and to our just transition towards net zero by 2045. We are pleased that National Grid ESO also recognises its importance and we call on Ofgem to ensure that the new 1.8GW link is included in its final list of projects for accelerated investment so that that vital piece of work can be completed well ahead of our 2030 targets.

*Meeting closed at 18:33.*





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