



OFFICIAL REPORT  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament

Wednesday 14 December 2022

Session 6



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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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# Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 14 December 2022

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

## Portfolio Question Time

### Covid-19 Recovery and Parliamentary Business

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** Good afternoon. The first item of business is portfolio question time, and the first portfolio is Covid-19 recovery and parliamentary business. Members who wish to ask a supplementary question should press their request-to-speak buttons or indicate so in the chat function by typing “RTS” during the relevant question.

#### Coronavirus (Recovery and Reform) (Scotland) Act 2022

**1. Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it has taken a decision regarding the extension of the temporary provisions in the Coronavirus (Recovery and Reform) (Scotland) Act 2022. (S6O-01676)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):** The temporary justice measures in the 2022 act can only be extended beyond November 2023 if the Parliament agrees. The act requires ministers to review the operation of the measures to decide whether they should be extended. That review must include consultation that ministers consider appropriate. If ministers decide that any measures should be extended, they will lay two documents before the Parliament: draft regulations to extend the measures by one year, and a statement summarising the review findings, the consultation undertaken and the reasons given for seeking an extension. Any regulations would be subject to the affirmative procedure.

**Tess White:** The 2022 act gave the Scottish Government the power to release prisoners prematurely at the stroke of a ministerial pen. That power was used to disastrous effect during the pandemic, when at least 40 per cent of those who were released early by this Government went on to reoffend. Will the cabinet secretary at the very least rule out extending the power to release prisoners early, given how disastrously that power was used the first time?

**John Swinney:** I do not for a moment accept the characterisation of the difficult issues with which we wrestled during the Covid pandemic that Tess White offered in her supplementary question.

The issues that she raises must be considered carefully by ministers. As I said in my original answer, the measures are subject to consultation with relevant interested parties and, of course, on that particular power there would have to be very extensive consultation and dialogue with interested parties and in particular with victims. I give Parliament the assurance that the Government will carefully consider all those issues, as would be expected of us under statute.

#### Covid Recovery Strategy (Budget 2021-22)

**2. Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the impact on the delivery of its Covid recovery strategy of the Auditor General's comments that it underspent its budget by £2 billion in the financial year 2021-22. (S6O-01677)

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

The Covid recovery strategy is focused on reducing inequalities and tackling poverty, and the Scottish Government is using all available resources to support those in most need during the on-going cost crisis.

The Scottish Government annual accounts provide explanations of all significant variances in the portfolio outturn statements, and make it clear that the underspend that was reported does not represent a loss of spending power. The underspend includes more than £900 million of non-cash and ring-fenced budgets, it is before allowing for late funding adjustments of more than £500 million, and it makes use of the limited carry forward in the Scotland reserve. The Scottish Government has reported transparently at the provisional outturn and will confirm the final outturn position to Parliament shortly. All funding is fully utilised in supporting the 2022-23 budget.

**Sharon Dowey:** The Deputy First Minister cannot claim that an enormous underspend of £2 billion made no difference to Scotland's recovery from Covid.

However, let us now focus on making sure that this does not happen again. The Auditor General, Stephen Boyle, has called for greater transparency around the Government's spending. He has said that the Government's accounts

“do not tell us the full picture”,

and he wants to see a “single public sector account”.

Last week, the Deputy First Minister deflected and refused to give a straight answer. Can the

public now have a clear decision? Will the Scottish National Party Government be more transparent with its spending or not?

**John Swinney:** The Government is immensely transparent about its expenditure. The Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth gave a statement to Parliament on the provisional outturn figures, and I have come to Parliament on two occasions to set out the financial challenges that we face this year. I did not need to do that—Opposition parties did not ask for it—but I voluntarily gave two statements to set out significant adjustments to our budget for this year.

I return to the points that I made when I answered Murdo Fraser's question on the matter last week. It is completely and utterly economically illiterate to suggest that there is money within that total figure that I could have spent, because there is not. There are ring-fenced budgets of about £900 million, and it is beyond my right to spend that money.

I ask the Conservatives to look at the *Official Report* from 6 December, when I went through all this with Murdo Fraser. If Sharon Dowey reads the *Official Report*, she will understand how ridiculous the question that she just asked me is and will perhaps, in due course, ask me a question that gets nearer to the substance of the issue.

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** Last month, the Deputy First Minister cut £400 million from health and social care budgets, including the primary care improvement fund, which supports general practitioners to increase capacity in local practices. Does he understand why staff and patients are concerned that ministers are picking their pockets by cutting funding and claiming that they have no other choice but to do so, despite the fact that they sat on an underspend of £2 billion last year? Will he take the opportunity to indicate that he will reverse the cuts in next year's budget?

**John Swinney:** I see that I will have to send Jackie Baillie a copy of last week's *Official Report*, too. I would have thought that she would have known that the Government cannot redeploy for other purposes large parts of the total figures that were set out in the Government's accounts. I reassure her, in case she is worried about this, that all available spending power that was not fully utilised last year will be utilised this year and in future years, so there is no loss of resources.

On the subject of picking pockets, the Government has reallocated and reprioritised resources within the health budget—nothing has been removed from the health budget—to ensure that we can afford a 7.5 per cent pay deal for agenda for change staff in the health service. We are, in fact, putting money into the pockets of staff.

I am delighted that members of the Unison and Unite trade unions have voted to accept the Government's pay offer. The quality of dialogue between the Scottish Government and trade unions in Scotland is significantly better than the quality of discussions between the United Kingdom Government and trade unions in England and, I might add, between Mr Wes Streeting and the Labour Party in England and trade unions south of the border.

**Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):** Does the Deputy First Minister agree that it would be good to know whether, ahead of tomorrow's budget statement, Sharon Dowey or any of her Tory colleagues have made any representations to the UK Government about Scotland being granted borrowing powers to allow the Scottish Government to manage its budget effectively and respond to the repeated economic shocks that have been created by the ill-judged and damaging economic policies of the UK Government?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Deputy First Minister, I assume that you will use that question—which was not directed at you, per se—to cover areas within your remit.

**John Swinney:** I will certainly endeavour to do that, Presiding Officer.

Kaukab Stewart makes an important point about the management of the public finances and ensuring that we have sufficient resources at our disposal. Sharon Dowey asked whether I would avoid any underspend this year and asked for such underspends never to happen again. There has been an underspend every year since the establishment of the Scottish Parliament, so last year was not really any different in that regard. I will have more to say to Parliament tomorrow about the current financial position that we face. However, one of the advantages of the underspend last year is that I have been able to access resources to deal with the enormous financial strain that we face this year in the absence of resource borrowing powers, which would allow me to borrow to deal with the volatility in the public finances.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I remind members that they need to be here on time for portfolio questions, which start at 2 pm. Two members did not manage to be here on time. When I call those members, I expect them to apologise to the chair, the ministers and other members, and to explain why they were late.

### **Talent Attraction and Migration Service (Covid Recovery Strategy)**

3. **Siobhian Brown (Ayr) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how the development of a talent attraction and migration service will impact

on the delivery of its Covid recovery strategy. (S6O-01678)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):** The Scottish Government is developing a talent attraction and migration service, which will launch in 2023. That service will attract people to come and live in Scotland, help people who are moving to Scotland to settle into their communities, and support employers in navigating the United Kingdom Government's complex immigration system.

The Covid recovery strategy, which aims to reduce inequalities and reform public services, includes a focus on creating good, green jobs across Scotland. The talent attraction and migration service will support our wider ambitions in that space by attracting and welcoming people with the necessary skills to contribute to a net zero economy.

**Siobhian Brown:** As the cabinet secretary knows, the American space technology company Mangata Networks has announced Prestwick as the site of its new manufacturing, engineering and operations hub. That will bring a much-welcome boost to the local economy and the national economy. How will the Scottish Government's proposed talent attraction and migration service assist with such projects?

**John Swinney:** I am absolutely delighted with the news that has come forward from Mangata Networks about the investment at Prestwick airport. The project has been a strong, collaborative one that has involved Scottish Enterprise, South Ayrshire Council, the Ayrshire growth deal and the Scottish Government. I am thrilled by the opportunities that it opens up for Prestwick, which is in Siobhian Brown's constituency.

The talent attraction and migration service will assist us in supporting companies that are trying to attract individuals to work in particular ventures. I imagine that Mangata Networks will seek some support from that service to ensure that the particular skills that we need to contribute to the Scottish economy are attracted. The service will help us to overcome some of the significant obstacles as a consequence of the loss of the free movement of individuals, which followed the Brexit decisions.

### **Cost of Living (Public Services)**

**4. Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of how any additional cost of living pressures will impact on the rebuilding of public services, as set out in its Covid recovery strategy,

in particular public services in Edinburgh. (S6O-01679)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):** The Scottish Government is prioritising funding to support people in most need and to protect the delivery of public services. The emergency budget review confirmed a range of additional support for people in most need, including the expansion of, and increase in, the Scottish child payment. That prioritisation is guided by the principles of the Covid recovery strategy.

The overarching ambition of the Covid recovery strategy is to reform public services to ensure that they are fiscally sustainable and delivered in line with the principles of the Christie commission. In the current context, we are considering all options for reform that will allow us to deliver that ambition and continue to deliver high-quality public services across Scotland, including in the city of Edinburgh.

**Miles Briggs:** The capital has some of the highest vacancy rates in our public services and some of the highest housing and childcare costs. I have previously raised with the Scottish Government the potential development of an Edinburgh pay weighting. Will the cabinet secretary agree to meet me to discuss that further and whether the Government will look to commission university research into the potential need for an Edinburgh weighting, such as that in London?

**John Swinney:** Mr Briggs raises serious issues, and I will happily meet him to discuss that concept. On that occasion, perhaps we can think further about any particular research that will be necessary in that respect. I suspect that some work must have been undertaken—it is a few years since I have been close to that question. Our dear late colleague Margo MacDonald was never backward in coming forward to me in budget processes to argue on the issues that Mr Briggs has raised. I will happily meet him to discuss that question.

**Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP):** With every week that passes, we see the impact of the disastrous mini-budget that Truss and her Chancellor of the Exchequer got carried away writing. It continues to affect Scotland's recovery from the Covid pandemic. Does the Deputy First Minister agree that, given that the key policy levers to address the Tory-inflicted cost of living crisis are held by the United Kingdom Government, it is high time that our Tory colleagues called on the UK Government to get on with the job of supporting Scottish people through tough times rather than expecting the Scottish Government to continually clean up?

**John Swinney:** The implications of the mini-budget in September will be long lasting for people and for the public finances of Scotland and the United Kingdom. The irresponsibility of that event—I cannot call it a fiscal event, because there was nothing fiscal about it—will have far-reaching implications. We have already seen significant increases in interest rates as a consequence of those decisions, and householders and businesses will be put under pressure as a result. I will have more to say about this in the budget statement tomorrow, but the Scottish Government will do all that we can to help people through the cost of living crisis. However, we have to acknowledge the severity of the difficulties that have been created by the mistakes that were made in the mini-budget in September.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 5 is from Rachael Hamilton.

**Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** First, Presiding Officer, I apologise profusely to you and my colleagues in the chamber for being a couple of minutes late. I was in committee from 9.45 until 1 o'clock, and then I went to see Hawick high school pupils, who have made the precarious journey up to the Parliament to ask questions about what we do in this place.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I thank Ms Hamilton for the explanation. Obviously, it is not a matter for the chair what other engagements members seek to fit in to what is already a busy day—

**Rachael Hamilton:** Sorry, but you did ask me—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Please—

**Rachael Hamilton:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. You asked me to apologise to my colleagues and to you, and to give a reason as to why I was late coming to the chamber.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** To respond specifically to that point of order, I hear what Ms Hamilton has said by way of an explanation; I was just trying to be helpful, for future reference, and to point out that, obviously, it is not a matter for the chair to work around individual members' busy schedules on a daily basis. I appreciate that schedules are busy but, equally, a start time of 2 pm remains a start time of 2 pm.

I ask Ms Hamilton to please ask her question.

### Passage of Legislation through Parliament

**5. Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what it considers to be reasonable grounds to postpone the passage of legislation through Parliament. (S6O-01680)

**The Minister for Parliamentary Business (George Adam):** The Government keeps its primary and secondary legislation programmes under careful review and adapts them as necessary. For example, as members are aware, steps were taken to pause delivery of some legislation in the previous session at the height of the pandemic. However, once bills are in Parliament, the timing of the legislative process is for Parliament to agree.

**Rachael Hamilton:** This morning, the Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee, of which I am a member, considered the Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 for a second week. The bill was delayed by two weeks as a result of the minister's trip to COP27—the 27th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—in Egypt. We were also afforded the opportunity to hear further evidence on provisions of the bill that were causing confusion.

In stark contrast, despite the availability of a raft of extra evidence, such as the interim report of the Cass review, the comments of the UN special rapporteur on violence against women and girls, and two separate court rulings on the effect of obtaining a gender recognition certificate on the definition of “woman”—I could go on—the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill has been railroaded through the Parliament with total disregard for the need to consider that additional evidence.

Why is it that we have one rule for one bill and another rule for the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill? Does the minister recognise the need for us as legislators to be allowed to do our jobs and apply adequate scrutiny to legislation using all the evidence that is available to us?

**George Adam:** The two bills that the member has mentioned show the flexibilities that are available in the Parliament for bills to go through. As always, my role as Minister for Parliamentary Business is to work within parliamentary procedure. The timings of bills are dependent on their size and details. Once a bill is in the Scottish Parliament, it is for the Parliament to decide how it proceeds. On some occasions, a bill might take a faster route, depending on what it is about and what it is trying to achieve. Parliament itself decides the timings of all bills.

### Covid Recovery Strategy (Rural Communities)

**6. Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how its Covid recovery strategy considers the needs of rural communities. (S6O-01681)



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

The Covid recovery strategy sets out an ambitious vision for recovery that is focused on bringing about a fairer future for those most affected during the pandemic, including people living in rural communities. The Covid recovery programme board, which I co-chair alongside the president of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, oversees work to achieve that vision and recognises the need for local communities to inform on-going priorities for recovery.

Policies such as the place-based investment fund and the regeneration capital grant fund support investment and regeneration projects that are shaped by the needs and aspirations of local communities and deliver inclusive growth for remote communities.

**Jim Fairlie:** As the Deputy First Minister knows, rural communities are often reliant on reliable bus routes to link them to shops, facilities and amenities in our larger towns and cities. The bus industry has an acute shortage of drivers. He will also be aware that, in October, more than 140 bus departures in Perth and Kinross were cancelled in one day.

As we recover from Covid, it is clear that Brexit is contributing to those driver shortages. When did the Scottish Government last engage with the United Kingdom Government on the issue? The powers to fix the matter reside with the UK Government. Has it given any indication of what it intends to do to improve the situation for our rural communities?

**John Swinney:** I acknowledge the significance of the issues that Mr Fairlie raises. We share constituency boundaries and I am aware that similar issues are being wrestled with in my constituency.

As coincidence would have it, the Minister for Transport hosted the second bus task force meeting earlier today, which the UK Government minister Richard Holden attended, to discuss the issue of driver shortages.

As Mr Fairlie will know, there are acute shortages of employees across a range of sectors. The shortage of bus drivers is particularly acute. The situation is being exacerbated by the loss of free movement of people and the pressures that that has put on our labour market.

Yesterday, it was announced that we have very high levels of employment and very low levels of unemployment, so we still have a very tight labour market.

We are continuing to work with operators and our partners across the public sector to promote the bus sector as a place to work, while

recognising that many of the levers to address the issue of population migration rest with the UK Government.

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** Driver shortages is an issue that I have experienced in my constituency. We must make progress on the matter.

In my constituency, there have been cuts to services. Stagecoach has told me that that is because of the fall in bus usage since the pandemic. How will the Scottish Government drive up passenger numbers and improve usage levels? Will the community bus fund be used to do that?

**John Swinney:** Mr Rennie raises a number of legitimate points on the provision of bus services. We are supporting the industry to increase usage. For example, the extension of the concessionary travel scheme to young people has had a discernible effect. Obviously, the Government contributes on the basis of the number of concessionary fares that are given.

Measures such as that one are designed to increase usage of bus services. There will be various ways in which we can support the industry, and the Government looks to work with it to find the most effective ways in which we can do that. The member's points about the community bus fund are ones that the Government will consider.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Murdo Fraser has a supplementary question.

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Willie Rennie has raised a really important point in relation to bus services being withdrawn entirely. That is causing concern for many people who live in rural communities, such as the elderly, who rely on the bus to get to medical appointments or to avoid social isolation. What will the Scottish Government do in its budget tomorrow to support bus services?

**John Swinney:** Tempting as it is for me to disclose the details of the budget to the Parliament today, Mr Fraser will understand that I cannot do that.

I am mindful of those issues, because ensuring that we encourage people to use public transport—and for there to be credible bus services to allow people to choose to use that transport—is very much part of the Government's agenda to decarbonise transport as part of our moves towards net zero.

**Covid-19 Recovery (Support for Disabled People in the North-East)**

**7. Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government how its policies across Government will support disabled

people living in the north-east to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic. (S6O-01682)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):** The impacts of the pandemic were not felt evenly across Scotland and some people, including disabled people, were disproportionately affected. The Scottish Government recognises that, and our Covid recovery strategy focuses on delivering a fairer future and addressing the systemic inequalities that were exacerbated during the pandemic.

**Maggie Chapman:** In September, the Scottish Government accepted the findings and recommendations of the report, "Review of Supported Employment within Scotland: Findings and Recommendations". Its recommendations include the development of a national infrastructure programme; the development of supported employment quality standards and an assurance approach for Scotland; and the provision of funding for people with lived experience

"to deliver training to employers, myth bust and raise aspirations."

Will the Deputy First Minister provide timelines for the implementation of those recommendations through the no one left behind strategy and for the publication of the Government's planned new policies on supported employment arising from the report's recommendations?

**John Swinney:** I can confirm that the issues that Maggie Chapman raises will be fully addressed as part of the no one left behind work that the Government is undertaking. The next stage of development is expected to commence early in the new year and will involve the delivery of specialist support services, and I will be very happy to update Maggie Chapman on the progress that is made.

It is important that we continue to deliver services to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities and support their participation in our society and economy.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I can call question 8, but only if the questions and answers are brief. I call Paul Sweeney.

**Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab):** Thank you, Presiding Officer. I apologise for being two minutes late to this meeting of the Parliament, which was due to being at a meeting to do with racism in Scottish society.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Sweeney, please take a seat. I need to be equal to everybody, so I remind you that it is not a matter for the chair to fit around a member's schedule. The meeting started at 2 o'clock. You were three

and a half minutes late, as a point of fact. Although I hear your explanation, that is not really a matter for the chair. I note that you have apologised, so please now ask your question, but reflect on that before future portfolio question times.

### **Covid Recovery Strategy (Impact of Industrial Action)**

**8. Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what impact industrial action by public sector workers will have on the delivery of its Covid recovery strategy. (S6O-01683)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):** The Scottish Government recognises the concerns of public service workers and the need for sustainable pay deals and fair working conditions. Indeed, the Scottish Government has supported public sector pay increases at an anticipated additional cost of £700 million.

The Government will continue to engage with workforces as part of our work to implement the principles of the Covid recovery strategy, which focuses on reforming public services and reducing systemic inequalities.

**Paul Sweeney:** I commend the Government for finally stepping in on the industrial action that was proposed by nurses in Scotland. That could and should have been done sooner, but it is better late than never.

The cabinet secretary will know that nurses are not the only public sector workers who are set to take industrial action if their pay demands are not met. Will he today commit the Government to showing the same respect to other vital public sector workers, including hard-working teachers, who are in dire straits due to the cost of living crisis and desperately need a pay increase that is greater than what is currently on offer?

**John Swinney:** I point out to Mr Sweeney that the Government has been actively involved in trying to resolve pay disputes for some considerable time. I spent a large part of the summer working to resolve local government pay issues and I have spent a large part of the autumn trying to resolve civil service and health service issues, and I am delighted, as I said in my answer to Jackie Baillie, that Unison and Unite have accepted the offer that the Government has made.

I acknowledge the claim that members of the teaching profession have made, but I simply say that all claims must be affordable. Mr Sweeney knows very well that, in this financial year, the Government is significantly constrained by the availability of resources. I have explained all these issues to the leaders of all the teaching trade unions and have set out the very real challenges that exist in trying to deliver the pay increase that

members of the teaching profession have proposed, which is, in the Government's view, unaffordable. We are open for negotiation, but the propositions must be affordable, and the Government and our local authority partners must be able to find the resources to finance them.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes portfolio questions on Covid-19 recovery and parliamentary business.

## Finance and the Economy

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The next portfolio is finance and the economy. I remind members that questions 1 and 2 are grouped together, so I will take any supplementaries on those questions once they have both been answered. If a member wishes to request a supplementary question, they should press their request-to-speak button or indicate that in the chat function by entering "RTS" during the relevant question.

### Budget 2023-24 (Tax Increases)

**1. Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will incorporate the costed package of tax increases recommended in the Scottish Trades Union Congress-commissioned report, "Options for increasing taxes in Scotland to fund investment in public services", into its 2023-24 budget. (S6O-01684)

**The Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth (Tom Arthur):** The Scottish Government welcomes the report published by the Scottish Trades Union Congress and recognises the contribution that such publications make to public discourse on Government finance and tax policy. The Scottish Government will set out tomorrow its budget position for 2023-24, including proposals on tax policy, fully costed by the Scottish Fiscal Commission.

**Mercedes Villalba:** The Scottish Government is well aware of the indefensible wealth inequalities that blight Scotland, yet when I called on the First Minister to support even the principle of a wealth tax back in March, I was told that that is

"not something that this Government has the power to put in place."—[*Official Report*, 24 March 2022; c 27.]

Last week, the STUC outlined exactly how a wealth tax could be implemented. Instead of pleading powerlessness, will the minister tell us what the Government has done, in 15 years in power, to develop a wealth tax?

**Tom Arthur:** The provisions to introduce new national taxes are contained in section 80B of the Scotland Act 1998; it requires an order in council

to be made, which requires the agreement of the United Kingdom Government. I therefore suggest to the member that that is the barrier. If she thinks that the Prime Minister will be amenable to the introduction of a wealth tax and the devolution of that power to Scotland, and if she has any particular strategic insight into how that could be achieved, I will be most happy to hear from her.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 2 comes from Gillian Mackay, who joins us remotely.

### Taxation Policy

**2. Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the papers on taxation policy recently published by the Scottish Trades Union Congress and the Institute for Public Policy Research Scotland. (S6O-01685)

**The Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth (Tom Arthur):** As I outlined in my answer to the previous question, the Scottish Government welcomes the Scottish Trades Union Congress report and the report by the Institute for Public Policy Research Scotland. We recognise the value of such publications in promoting public discussion on Government finance and tax policy, and we will set out our budget position for 2023-24 tomorrow.

**Gillian Mackay:** Does the minister agree that the reforms that were agreed by the Scottish Greens and the Scottish Government in the previous parliamentary session have resulted in Scotland having a more progressive version of income tax than that anywhere else in the United Kingdom, with people who earn less paying less and those who earn more paying a bit more, and additional funds being raised for public services? Does he also agree that the taking of a progressive and fair approach to tax in Scotland, in stark contrast to the UK Government's chaotic mini-budget, tax giveaways to the rich and multiple U-turns, has ensured that Scotland is a more equal place and has helped to deliver major projects, such as free bus travel for under-22s and the topping up of the Scottish child payment?

**Tom Arthur:** I agree with Gillian Mackay. Since the devolution of income tax, we have created a fairer, more progressive income tax system in Scotland that raises vital revenue for the Scottish budget. That has involved asking people who are able to do so to contribute a little more, while protecting those who are not able to do so.

That approach has allowed us to maintain the most generous social contract in any part of the UK, with a range of social security payments and public services being available uniquely in Scotland, which ensures that Scotland remains a great place to live, work, study and do business in.

Our decisions on tax policy for 2023-24 will be set out tomorrow, and we will continue to be guided by the principles of fairness and progressivity that are set out in our framework for tax.

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** The Office for Budget Responsibility expects living standards to fall by 7 per cent over the next two years because of Tory economic incompetence, which means that it is inevitable that even low to middle-income earners will pay more tax. What discussions has the Scottish Government had with the UK Treasury regarding reducing tax avoidance—only yesterday, the OBR estimated that that costs £35 billion a year across the UK—to ensure that everyone pays their fair share? Does the minister believe that the Tories take the issue seriously, given that we have the Channel Islands and Isle of Man tax havens just off shore?

**Tom Arthur:** Mr Gibson is absolutely right to highlight the OBR's conclusions, in that people in Scotland are, ultimately, paying the price for the UK Government's mistakes. Although the majority of taxes are currently still reserved to Westminster, Scotland's framework for tax specifically sets out that our taxes are designed to combat tax avoidance, and the UK Government should follow our lead.

Tax avoidance takes away money that should be used to support households and public services. Such funds are needed even more now, so I will continue to urge the UK Government to tackle tax avoidance of any kind.

#### **Liberty Steel Dalzell**

**3. Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on support for Liberty Steel Dalzell. (S6O-01686)

**The Minister for Business, Trade, Tourism and Enterprise (Ivan McKee):** Through its agency Scottish Enterprise, the Scottish Government continues to work closely with Dalzell site management, and the company is continuing to trade through a challenging economic climate. As the member has recently been advised, repayments of the loan provided to Dalzell by Scottish Enterprise have not been made on time, but debt forbearance is not uncommon in the current market.

**Willie Rennie:** When the minister reported to Parliament on the state aid issues last December, he said that Tata would

"need time to reflect on ... its position."—[*Official Report*, 15 December 2021; c 25.]

However, our freedom of information release showed that Tata had already reflected. The night before the statement, Tata warned the Scottish Government that it would be prepared to take the Government to court. It did so in an official letter on the eve of the ministerial statement. Why did the minister choose not to tell Parliament, the very next day, about the risk of court action?

**Ivan McKee:** On 15 December 2021, we advised that Tata Steel had been informed of the matter and provided with prior notice of the statement that was delivered in the Scottish Parliament on that date, to allow it to consider any commercial implications for the business and ensure that it had time to notify its head office in Mumbai. When the statement was delivered, it was understandable that Tata Steel would need time to reflect on and consider its position. As previously stated, we will continue to have supportive dialogue with Tata, and the company has access to our officials as required.

#### **Budget 2023-24 (Discussions with Orkney Islands Council)**

**4. Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government when it last met Orkney Islands Council regarding the Scottish budget 2023-24 and what issues were discussed. (S6O-01687)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):** Scottish ministers last met Orkney Islands Council on 30 November, when I met Councillor James Stockan, the leader of the council, to discuss revenue and capital funding in relation to the 2023-24 budget, the 2023-24 local government finance settlement and funding for the Orkney Islands Council ferry services.

**Liam McArthur:** I understand that Councillor Stockan wrote to Mr Swinney this week to outline proposals to uprate the special islands needs allowance, which has remained static since 2008-09, when it was cut by 24 per cent. Mr Swinney knows my long-standing and serious concerns about the large disparity in funding that disadvantages Orkney compared with other island authorities. The proposed change to SINA could help to narrow that gap while benefiting other local authorities through the redistributive floor mechanism. Will the Deputy First Minister take on board those reasonable and progressive proposals and look to include them in next year's budget?

**John Swinney:** Mr McArthur puts to me the issues that Councillor Stockan put to me. There is a lot of complexity around the local government finance formula and there is a procedural question, because local government considers changes to the distribution formula through the

work of the settlement and distribution group, which is an entirely local authority-led process.

I have heard the issues that Councillor Stockan raised. Some of those questions interact with the setting of the floor for the local government finance settlement, which is also relevant to the question. Those points will be reflected on as the Government formulates its budget and as we consider it in its passage through Parliament over the next few months.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 5 was not lodged.

### Scottish Aggregates Levy (Consultation)

**6. Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its public consultation regarding the Scottish aggregates levy. (S6O-01689)

**The Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth (Tom Arthur):** The public consultation on developing a Scottish tax to replace the United Kingdom aggregates levy closed on 5 December. Twenty-five responses were received. They are being analysed and a consultation analysis report will be published in due course.

I appreciate the diverse perspectives that have been provided by the range of organisations that responded to the consultation. Consistent with the Scottish approach to taxation as set out in Scotland's framework for tax, we will continue to consult and engage with stakeholders to help to inform the development of the tax.

**Alexander Stewart:** Given the concerns that many different organisations have raised regarding the short time that was provided for public consultation, how will the Scottish Government ensure that stakeholders are listened to and given a strong voice in the design of the tax?

**Tom Arthur:** As Alexander Stewart will be aware from our framework for tax, one of our principles is engagement. Although the consultation is an important part of the engagement, it does not represent the entirety of that. I remain committed to engaging with stakeholders—my officials recently met stakeholders regarding the tax—and I will continue to do so. I will be happy to meet any member who has any particular issues that they wish to raise with me on an aggregates tax.

### Digital Economy (Support)

**7. Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how it will support innovation and entrepreneurship in

Scotland's digital economy, including its games sector. (S6O-01690)

**The Minister for Business, Trade, Tourism and Enterprise (Ivan McKee):** The Scottish Government recognises that innovation and entrepreneurship is the real engine of economic growth, and we are supporting Scotland's founders, innovators and entrepreneurs in many different ways—by delivering on our national strategy for economic transformation, through our forthcoming national innovation strategy and through leading entrepreneur Ana Stewart's review of women in enterprise.

Most recently, we launched our national tech scaler network, which is a £42 million investment that will widen access to entrepreneurial opportunities and support founders, including games company founders, by offering free commercial education and mentorship programmes while building a dynamic community of innovators and entrepreneurs.

**Clare Adamson:** Changing misconceptions about the games sector is vital to unlocking its enormous potential. I was pleased to host the inaugural Scottish Games Week reception here in the Parliament. The games sector's message is clear: through joined-up policy support, it has the potential to be transformative for Scotland's digital and creative futures.

Is the minister willing to engage with the Scottish Games Network and liaise with his counterpart in the culture portfolio to examine how we can support the industry and foster that potential for Scotland's digital and creative futures?

**Ivan McKee:** I was delighted to attend the Scottish Games Week event in Parliament that Clare Adamson organised and to speak to the businesses and others who were present to show the Scottish Government's support for and recognition of the importance of the sector and discuss how we can work together to build its future. I would be delighted to meet the member to discuss the matter further, and I have no doubt that my ministerial counterparts with responsibility for culture feel likewise on the issue.

As the member indicates, other countries have performed well in the area, and Scotland can learn from that to make sure that our games sector fulfils its global potential.

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Does the minister welcome the announcement this morning by the University of St Andrews about the establishment of a new business school that will focus specifically on innovation, entrepreneurship and the dissemination of digital education?

**Ivan McKee:** I absolutely do, and that will be part of the very strong and ever-expanding innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem. Our recent investments in the National Manufacturing Institute Scotland, the medicines manufacturing innovation centre and much else that is happening in Scotland's universities and elsewhere are a testament to the strength of Scotland's economy now and in the future.

**Foysoyl Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab):** Yesterday, the BBC reported a slowdown in recruitment in the games sector in Scotland as it responds to the cost of living crisis and economic uncertainty. Given Scotland's historic place in the industry, has the minister had discussions with the sector about the support that it needs to continue growing and realise its full economic potential?

**Ivan McKee:** We continue to work closely with the games sector and others across the digital economy and, indeed, the rest of the economy. Like many businesses across the economy, those businesses continue to suffer from a shortage of the skills, talent and labour that they need to fuel their growth potential. We continue to work to ensure that those skills are provided as necessary.

Despite the comments that the member makes on that specific issue, the sector will continue to go from strength to strength. Demand is strong and the skills here are great. The businesses are very well founded and we work with them to transmit that and find them opportunities globally.

#### **Audit of the Scottish Government Consolidated Accounts 2021-22**

**8. Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the comments from the Auditor General in his "2021/22 audit of the Scottish Government Consolidated Accounts" that financial support for Burntisland Fabrications Limited, Ferguson Marine Engineering Limited, Prestwick Airport and the Lochaber Aluminium Smelter "has not delivered expected outcomes and is unlikely to achieve value for money". (S6O-01691)

**The Minister for Business, Trade, Tourism and Enterprise (Ivan McKee):** The Scottish Government's financial support of those businesses is on-going, so it is not possible to make a full assessment of the final outcomes or value for money at this point. When a business faces difficulties that cannot be addressed by a market response and the business is critical to the economy or is a long-term strategic asset, we will rightly consider options for support. The Scottish Government will continue to work with those businesses to deliver value for money for the public purse.

**Graham Simpson:** Well, that was really not any kind of answer. The Auditor General said the following about Ferguson Marine:

"During 2021-22, the Scottish Government wrote off £52 million from the capital value. The value of vessels 801 and 802 in the Consolidated Accounts at 31 March 2022 was £78 million."

So far, the cost of building the vessels has been well in excess of £200 million for vessels that are worth £78 million, and that gap is only going to get wider. Does the minister believe that that is value for money?

**Ivan McKee:** We have taken the steps to preserve commercial shipbuilding on the Clyde for this and future generations and to maintain that strategic asset in Scotland's economy. We believe that doing so is hugely important. The communities and the workers that are employed at Ferguson's would certainly think so, and those who value Scotland's important commercial shipbuilding assets would think so, too.

My colleague the Deputy First Minister has reported back to Parliament on the specifics around the challenges that the yard faces and the Government support that has been put in place to ensure that it continues to operate and will deliver those ferries and future ferries.

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** The minister seems very casual in his response to the losses of hundreds of millions of pounds through those various industrial interventions. Has he learned anything from those episodes and losses? If so, can he tell the Parliament what?

**Ivan McKee:** Willie Rennie should have a look at the assets that are in place at Dalzell. It is still operating, employing a significant number of people, producing steel and keeping Scotland's steel production in play. The smelter at Lochaber continues to operate very successfully, as does the hydro scheme that is part of that site, where hundreds of people continue to be employed. We are glad that we made those interventions back in 2016. We have now had six or more years of continuous production and employment as a consequence. That pays tax into the Scottish economy, supports local communities and keeps those strategic assets in play, so I do not think that we have anything to apologise for.

As I have indicated in previous answers on the subject, the Government will step in where there is a strategic asset to be kept in play or there is something of importance to the Scottish economy. By virtue of the fact that, by their nature, such situations are ones where the private sector has declined its support, the Scottish Government is of course taking itself into a situation where there is a risk that things will not work out as we would all

hope. However, on balance, much of that work has been successful and continues to be so.

**Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab):** Does the minister agree that it is faintly ridiculous that, in order to avoid redundancies, Ferguson Marine, which is a publicly owned shipyard, is now almost entirely dependent on building sub-contract work for BAE Systems on a type 26 programme for the Ministry of Defence while the Scottish Government is handing a £100 million ferry contract to a Turkish shipyard and is likely to award another £100 million ferry contract to a Turkish shipyard? Is that not completely contradictory to any idea of a national ferry building or shipbuilding strategy?

**Ivan McKee:** No. We make decisions on where to place work based on criteria that are in place. We made decisions on supporting and working with strategic assets to ensure that they continue to operate. We work with and encourage other partners across the sector and beyond to co-operate where that makes sense in order to ensure that business flows into different operations and that it supports employment and the future of the sector as a consequence.

## Health Inequalities (Report)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-07198, in the name of Gillian Martin, on behalf of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee, on tackling health inequalities in Scotland.

14:50

**Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP):** As convener of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee, I am pleased to open the debate on the committee's recent inquiry into health inequalities. We would argue that this is an issue that is relevant to all areas of life, all areas of Government and all areas of parliamentary scrutiny.

In 2015, our predecessor committee held an inquiry into health inequalities. We did not want to replicate that work; instead, we set out to explore what progress has been made in tackling health inequalities since its report and what effect additional current factors such as the pandemic and the spiralling cost of living have had on people's lives.

Before setting out our findings, I thank everyone who was involved in our inquiry—every organisation, every professional and every individual who spoke to us and who responded to our call for views. I extend a special thank you to Voluntary Health Scotland; we collaborated with it on a series of informal engagement events involving people with lived and living experience of health inequalities to help us to understand how those inequalities have affected their daily lives.

What we heard during our inquiry was, sadly, not unexpected. Many witnesses pointed to deindustrialisation as having had a generational and decades-long impact on Scottish health inequalities way before devolution, but health inequalities also increased in the years leading up to the pandemic, and they have worsened since. Clearly, the pandemic affected everyone, but it had a disproportionate effect on some. That particularly includes people from black and ethnic minority communities, people from deprived backgrounds, people with disabilities and parents with disabled children, as well as carers—we know that women are impacted the most, as they shoulder most caring responsibilities and are more likely to be unpaid carers.

It is widely accepted that the fundamental causes of health inequalities are rooted in the unequal distribution of wealth and power. The pandemic exacerbated income inequalities, with 36 per cent of low-income households increasing their expenditure but 40 per cent of people with

the highest incomes decreasing their expenditure. Then came a rapid rise in the cost of living, and of course that happened smack bang in the middle of our scrutiny. Again, although that has affected everyone to some degree, those with the least have been hit the hardest. Older people and those living with or caring for someone with disabilities or complex health conditions are among the more severely affected, and that is just not acceptable. Most shockingly, an increasing number of households have been forced to choose between eating and heating. How much inequality are we prepared to tolerate before taking collective and systemic action?

As a committee, we were very clear that we wanted to set out some tangible recommendations that could help to tackle health inequalities and improve people's lives. For many years, a lot of the rhetoric around health inequalities has been focused on mitigating the outcomes, but we are clear on the need to tackle the underlying causes at their source and to align policy and decision making along those lines.

Our report found that there is a policy implementation gap, which may hold a lot of the blame for the stubborn persistence of health inequalities. We need to look at that implementation gap in relation to national policy as it is delivered locally. There are lots of policies out there, but are they landing? That point comes up time and again in discussions with experts in health inequalities. Are all the good policies that are out there having the effect that they were designed to produce and are they being deployed effectively?

Decisions made at every level, reaching far beyond health policy to every area of decision making, are having a major impact on people's exposure to health inequalities; logically, the solutions must equally lie at every level and across every area of policy. We call for urgent action across all levels of government—local government, Scottish Government and United Kingdom Government—because they all have a significant part to play, and our report made recommendations to each level of government.

We did something quite unusual in our committee report, in that we made recommendations to other committees about further scrutiny opportunities in their portfolio areas, because many of the causes of health inequalities and the solutions to them are not in the health portfolio: they lie in housing, planning, energy, social security, education, justice, and many more areas. I am delighted that so many of the Parliament's committees have acknowledged that and that members of those committees are taking part in the debate.

At the outset of our inquiry, Professor Sir Michael Marmot told us that no one policy measure on its own could fix the health inequality problem. If it were that easy, it would have been fixed by now. He memorably said that every minister should be a health minister, and that equity in health and wellbeing needs to be at the heart of all policy making. The Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport put it very well when she told us that, in her opinion

"the Parliament needs to be a public health Parliament in which all parties come together to consider how we work jointly to tackle issues."

She echoed the committee's view when she said that

"The answers to health inequality do not lie simply in my public health portfolio."—[*Official Report, Health, Social Care and Sport Committee*, 28 June 2022; c 2-3, 4.]

How right she is.

There is currently no overarching strategy for tackling health inequalities in Scotland. There are arguments about whether that is needed; however, we are clear that, with or without a defined health inequality strategy, we need to redouble our focus on fostering collaboration across portfolios, so that all relevant policy areas and levels of government are pulling in the same direction and contributing actively and positively to tackling health inequalities. We would like to see a reinforced commitment to cross-portfolio working in order to explore preventative strategies for tackling health inequalities.

I am not just talking about the Scottish Government; the recommendations in the committee's report are equally directed towards the UK Government and local government. I am aware that it is a considerable feat to align multiple governments and diverse areas of policy towards any shared goal of reducing, and ultimately eliminating, health inequalities. However, our report is very clear that if we are going to achieve that goal we need to break out of our silos.

I am grateful for the cabinet secretary's extensive response to our report, which we received earlier this month. I note the Scottish Government's commitment to strategic reform as part of its care and wellbeing portfolio, as well as the proactive cross-portfolio discussions that it is embarking on to prioritise a preventative approach that is aimed at tackling health inequalities. I hope that we hear more about that in the debate. I also look forward to seeing the results of the work that has been done by Scottish Government body Public Health Scotland to undertake health impact assessments in relation to the rising cost of living, with a view to identifying future actions to mitigate those impacts.



I end by thanking my colleagues across committees for their interest in the debate. I look forward to hearing their perspectives on how we can take forward a genuinely collaborative cross-portfolio approach to tackling health inequalities.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the conclusions and recommendations contained in the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee's 11th Report, 2022 (Session 6), *Tackling health inequalities in Scotland* (SP Paper 230).

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I advise members that we are pretty tight for time. I would appreciate it if colleagues could stick to their allocated speaking time and accommodate interventions within that allocation.

I call Clare Adamson to speak on behalf of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee, for around four minutes.

14:58

**Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP):** I thank the convener and members of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee for the deliberations that are contained in its informative and challenging report. The subject of the debate is relevant to us all, as Gillian Martin so rightly points out. It is relevant to all areas of life, all areas of government, and all areas of parliamentary scrutiny.

I will reflect on the work that the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee has looked at in relation to the wellbeing society, which is something that we all aspire to, and cover three areas: the wider benefits of culture, mainstreaming and preventative spend. I will start with what University College London in its submission to the committee described as the "grade A evidence" on the impact of music to support infant social development, reading to support child social development, and the arts to support aspects of social cohesion, improve wellbeing, and reduce physical decline in older age.

The World Health Organization cited 3,000 studies that

"...identified a major role for the arts in the prevention of ill health, promotion of health, and management and treatment of illness across the lifespan."

According to Creative Scotland, the challenges in fulfilling the arts role are multifold and involve funding, awareness, staffing, integration, reaching those who are the most compromised by inequality, building partnerships and evaluation, which touches on the question of how we measure what works in terms of preventative spend. Of course, inequalities of access to the arts play their part in those challenges.

We should not underestimate the severity of the cost of living crisis. Our pre-budget scrutiny found a perfect storm of financial pressure facing the sector, and I am sure that other subject committees will have heard similar evidence. However, those are challenges that we must overcome if we are to make the most of the transformational power of culture. Mainstreaming—as my committee and many others contend—is a means to do that.

Audit Scotland has made the case for

"different thinking about what we consider to be health funding, because health is much broader than the National Health Service."—[*Official Report, Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee*, 17 March 2022; c 6.]

That is why, when we took evidence on the published resource spending review, we heard from the Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture and the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care at the same time—such is our commitment to mainstreaming.

The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities called for "whole-system thinking" when it comes to addressing the social determinants of health, and the National Galleries of Scotland highlighted the

"many individual cultural projects and initiatives relating to health and wellbeing across Scotland"

but found those to be

"fragmentary and not joined up by any national strategy or framework".

It described the ambition to embed culture in health and wellbeing as

"still rotating in mid-air in rhetoric"—[*Official Report, Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee*, 29 September 2022; c 45.]

It is nearly 12 years since publication of the Christie commission report. Lest we forget, the report's four pillars were: partnership working; prevention of negative outcomes; reducing duplication; and empowering individuals and communities.

SENScot told us that we

"need to start to think, act and spend differently, and see prevention within an 'investment paradigm'",

whereby we would invest now in order for a flow of benefits to be realised over time.

There are a lot of culture projects out there working to support health and wellbeing, such as storytelling workshops for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, dementia-inclusive singing networks and art-in-hospital programmes, and I am delighted that we have been able to see some of them in action. However, we need a better understanding of what works well, who it

works for, and when it should be delivered. That understanding can then drive a greater use of cultural services in support of health outcomes.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Siobhian Brown to speak on behalf of the COVID-19 Recovery Committee.

15:02

**Siobhian Brown (Ayr) (SNP):** It is a pleasure to speak as the convener of the COVID-19 Recovery Committee in this debate on such an important topic, and I commend the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee for bringing the debate to the chamber.

Health inequalities have featured in all of our work, but I will talk about one inquiry in particular. First, however, it is important to stress that, sadly, health inequalities existed before the pandemic and have been made much worse as a result of it. As we go through recovery, that issue has been concerning to the committee. Recently, in this chamber, we debated the cost of living crisis, which has also exacerbated health inequalities. Therefore, today's debate is timely, and I look forward to hearing about other parliamentary committees' scrutiny of this major issue and to potential collaborative committee work in the future.

In April this year, we wrote to the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care on our inquiry into excess deaths in Scotland since the start of the pandemic. We wanted to look at the extent to which excess deaths were caused by Covid-19 as opposed to other issues, such as the indirect health impacts of the pandemic. It was a difficult inquiry because, when looking at the statistics, we were acutely aware that they represented the end of the lives of real people. I send my condolences to everyone who has suffered such a loss.

We heard of the pressures that the national health service faces, some of the health impacts that are being experienced by individuals and the level of demand that services face. Given the complexity of the inquiry, we found that it was too early to tell the exact impact that the pandemic has had on excess deaths. However, we heard some stark evidence of how the pandemic hit those from deprived areas harder and that that could have had an impact on excess deaths.

We were shocked to hear that the levels of excess deaths in the most deprived areas were twice as great as those in the least deprived areas and that people who live in deprived areas are more likely to get cancer, to be diagnosed later and to die because of it, which is simply unacceptable in this day and age. In making our recommendations, we highlighted that as a priority

issue that must be addressed as part of Scotland's recovery. We asked the Government to set out its response to the recommendations made by the primary care health inequalities short-life working group, which had looked into how primary care and communities could be strengthened and supported to mitigate health inequalities more effectively.

The group made five foundational recommendations, which are worth highlighting today. First, the Government should strengthen national leadership on health inequalities. Secondly, it should implement a national programme of multidisciplinary postgraduate training fellowships in health inequalities. Thirdly, it should create an inclusion-enhanced service that invests in the management of patients who experience multiple and intersecting socioeconomic inequalities. Fourthly, it should develop a strategy to invest in wellbeing communities through local, place-based action to reduce inequalities. Fifthly, it should commission an investigation into how barriers to healthcare can, inadvertently, contribute to excess deaths and premature disability that are related to socioeconomic inequalities.

The Government agreed that health inequalities is a priority issue that must be addressed as part of Scotland's recovery and said that it had established a new development group to focus on driving forward responses to those recommendations. It will be interesting to monitor that work, and we intend to follow up the work on excess deaths when we look at the recovery of cancer services in the new year.

I will turn briefly to our work on the on-going vaccination programme. The committee has continued to monitor the vaccination programme, including the booster vaccination. We have looked at the reasons behind below-average take-up in some demographics, particularly among minority ethnic communities and in communities that experience higher levels of deprivation. We considered equity of access to vaccination programmes, as well as access to trusted and reliable public health information on Covid and vaccinations.

Presiding Officer, I have run out of time, so I will finish there.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Natalie Don to speak on behalf of the Social Justice and Social Security Committee.

15:07

**Natalie Don (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP):** I thank the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee for bringing this important debate to the chamber today.

The starting point for the health committee's inquiry is that

"health inequalities are a symptom rather than the cause of the problem. Health inequalities arise from the unequal distribution of income, wealth and power and the societal conditions this creates".

Addressing socioeconomic inequality is a priority focus for the Social Justice and Social Security Committee. We have been exploring support for people who experience low income and debt, investigating whether policies to tackle child poverty are achieving that aim and scrutinising the delivery of social security to ensure that it provides a vital safety net for those who need it.

Health inequality is a long-standing issue. Entrenched poverty can have a generational impact and it adversely affects every aspect of someone's life. Child poverty impacts on children's ability to enjoy their childhoods and achieve their aspirations. Low-income households spend more of their money on essentials and often have little or no disposable income to cover a rise in costs. Those extremely difficult circumstances have been compounded by the cost of living crisis.

As Gillian Martin said, certain groups are more likely to experience poverty and, therefore, experience worse health outcomes. Disabled people are disproportionately more likely to be living in poverty and make up 48 per cent of the total number of people in Scotland who live in poverty. Disabled people and families with disabled children face extra costs of more than £1,000 a month. Women are more likely than men to be in poverty. Their experiences of poverty are directly tied to their experiences of the labour market and social security and in relation to their undertaking caring roles.

With regard to lone parents specifically, the following example from our fuel poverty focus group details the punishing decisions that one lone parent faces daily:

"Heating is a no go. I use energy for cooking, washing and lights. I keep a note of the units I'm using, but the bills keep going up and up. The heating is on for a maximum of 30 minutes, and I stay under a blanket with a hot water bottle to keep warm. I'm living on an income of just over £7,000 for 3 people, without food banks we wouldn't survive. I'm on 25 painkillers a day and eat one meal a day as I want the best for my kids. My mental health is getting worse, and my health is getting worse—I hate winter, the temperatures are dipping".

That is just one example of the many people who are in crisis. Our inquiry into low income and debt underlined the strong links between poverty, debt and poor mental health. Social stigma is highlighted as a significant barrier to seeking support, which increases the impact on mental health. The Scottish Association for Mental Health explained that the drivers for suicide can include

"feelings of humiliation, entrapment and hopelessness, all of which are very common amongst people in problem debt."

People living in poverty are more likely to live in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and in overcrowded or unsuitable housing, and homelessness is both a cause and the result of social inequality, health inequality and poverty.

Homeless people experience poorer physical and mental health than the general population does, and the complex needs and circumstances of many people who experience homelessness make accessing housing and other services, including health services, more difficult. The Health, Social Care and Sport Committee's report highlights the essential connection between access to safe, secure and affordable housing and achieving positive health and wellbeing outcomes.

Key findings from our committee's work also show the need for suitable, sustainable housing. Others include early identification of the threat of homelessness to enable prevention. Those actions, alongside better integration of support services, all contribute to minimising homelessness and its impact.

Social security can do some of the heavy lifting in the short term, but to tackle poverty and the symptoms of poverty, such as health inequality, there needs to be a comprehensive radical, long-term and targeted economic approach. My committee will continue to work to improve the lives of the most vulnerable in our society.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Audrey Nicoll to speak on behalf of the Criminal Justice Committee.

15:11

**Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** I am very pleased to speak in this important debate on behalf of the Criminal Justice Committee. I thank the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee for bringing the debate to the chamber.

Inequality, poverty and health are threads that run right through many of the issues that the Criminal Justice Committee is considering. In "The Vision for Justice in Scotland", the Scottish Government states that

"Crime and victimisation are intrinsically linked to deep-seated issues such as poverty and income and wealth inequality."

It also states that 33 per cent of people in prison are from the most deprived areas of Scotland, which is a truly shocking statistic. I agree with the convener of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee that more focus is needed on

prevention and tackling the underlying causes of health inequality.

Last week, I attended a conference on policing mental health, and I listened to one contributor describe how

“prevention always loses in the backroom of power.”

That cannot, and does not, reflect our approach in Scotland. However, sectors, organisations and individuals must be supported with appropriate legislative and other structures to make preventative approaches succeed.

One area for improvement is ensuring that support is in place for people on their leaving prison. When people are released without a fixed address, little access to benefits or employment, and difficult access to health services such as a general practitioner, there is a high likelihood that they will simply return to prison.

As others have mentioned, the cost of living crisis and high fuel costs are disproportionately impacting the poorest people in Scotland. There is a real danger that, without extra support, those who are struggling to survive will simply turn to petty crime.

Recently, Chief Superintendent Phil Davison of Police Scotland warned that the force has noticed changes in the type of items that are being taken in shoplifting incidents, with people now stealing more basic necessities. That change in behaviour is causing the police service to become extremely concerned over the wider impact of the cost of living crisis.

An area of the Criminal Justice Committee’s on-going work is how to improve the policing responses to those who are experiencing poor mental health. Officers cannot take someone from a private place—normally their home—to a place of safety; therefore, in order to fulfil their duty of care, when someone is in mental health distress, one option is that they might have to arrest the person, regardless of the fact that they have committed no crime. That simply makes their situation worse, leaving people feeling criminalised by a system that is supposed to protect them.

A sensitive policing approach is very much needed when dealing with people whose issues are health related. We saw during Covid that a more sensitive, considerate and compassionate approach to policing was extremely effective and appropriate.

There have been a couple of welcome developments in ensuring that people with health issues are given the right support. The first of those is the collaboration between Police Scotland and Public Health Scotland to address public health and wellbeing in communities across the country. The second is that each health board in

Scotland is now providing access to a mental health clinician 24 hours a day, seven days a week. I look forward to seeing the impact of those initiatives.

I thank everyone who has contributed to the work of the Criminal Justice Committee. I also echo the comments of the public health minister, who said that the answers to health inequality do not lie simply in the public health portfolio. Finally, I again thank the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee for securing today’s debate on this very important issue.

15:15

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Humza Yousaf):** I welcome the opportunity to open the debate on the Scottish Government’s behalf. I thank the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee for the comprehensive work that it has undertaken this year for its inquiry. I thank also the clerks, all those who gave evidence and my colleagues who were around the committee table. My colleague the Minister for Public Health, Women’s Health and Sport played a role by giving evidence to the committee, and she will sum up on the Government’s behalf.

That so many conveners and representatives of committees have already contributed to today’s debate demonstrates the importance attached to the issue at hand by not only the Parliament and the Government but the entire country. Natalie Don was absolutely right that we cannot look at health inequalities without looking at their root causes. I will pick up on points that have been made where I can.

The Government has a role to play in addressing the long-standing health challenges and health inequalities that exist but, equally, it is not a job that we can do alone. It is now more crucial than ever that we work collaboratively not just across the chamber—I think that everybody will agree to that—but across society. It is also important for the Government to work across portfolio boundaries, and I will say more about that in my contribution.

Members have been absolutely right to make the point, with which the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee’s convener started her contribution, that health inequalities existed pre-pandemic. There is no argument from me or the Government about that; we faced ingrained challenges in relation to health inequalities before the pandemic. The convener was equally right to say that those issues have undoubtedly been exacerbated by the pandemic and further impacted by the on-going cost of living crisis. The scale of the challenges that we face has never been greater.

The truth is that inequality has been exacerbated by years of austerity imposed by the UK Government. Recent evidence from the Glasgow Centre for Population Health and the University of Glasgow showed that a decade of cuts has damaged lives, made our communities more vulnerable and led to many dying before their time. Our poorest areas have undoubtedly been hit the hardest. An additional 335,000 deaths were observed across Scotland, England and Wales between 2012 and 2019. That is unacceptable.

We plead with the UK Government—we urge it—to change course from its current harmful policies. The Chancellor of the Exchequer’s most recent autumn statement does not go nearly far enough. In our view, the measures that he outlined are insufficient to help us deal with this crisis. Let us be clear that, at its heart, the cost crisis is a public health crisis. Natalie Don relayed just one testimony from one parent of having to choose between heating and eating. How can that not have an impact on public health?

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** Does the cabinet secretary recognise that, if we are to tackle health inequalities, we must deal with the reality? He cannot say, on the one hand, that the Scottish Government is 100 per cent responsible for record investment in the national health service but, on the other, that health inequalities are a problem due to Westminster.

**Humza Yousaf:** I am not suggesting that the problem is all to do with Westminster. I am simply making the point, as others have done, that serious academics at the University of Glasgow and many organisations, including the Child Poverty Action Group and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, have said that austerity has clearly been the driver of inequality over the past decade. There cannot be any argument about that, even if Brian Whittle is happy to argue the opposite.

I am coming to the important action that the Scottish Government can take. I am afraid that not all the financial levers are in our hands, although some of them are. John Swinney, the Deputy First Minister, will lay out our budget tomorrow as interim finance secretary.

Some of the levers are in our hands, and there is the possibility for us to take action. I am proud that the Scottish Government has provided £3 billion in this financial year to help the lowest-paid households, the most vulnerable and people in the areas of highest deprivation through the current crisis. Our “Best Start, Bright Futures: Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2022-2026” outlines the wide-ranging action that we are taking. When it comes to tackling child poverty, the transformative increase in the Scottish child payment will be a

real “game changer”—those are not my words but those of many of our third sector partners.

**Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab):** The cabinet secretary will know that I agree that austerity has been the key driver of inequality. I have been positive about what has happened with the Scottish child payment, but a lot of organisations say that we need to go further. Does he agree that we should be going further at this stage?

**Humza Yousaf:** We will always engage with third sector organisations, Opposition parties and others to see whether we can go further. As I said, John Swinney will tomorrow lay out the budget for the next financial year, so I will leave him to say more about that.

Many committee conveners and other representatives have made the point that it is incumbent on the Scottish Government to work collaboratively. We are doing just that, in part, through the care and wellbeing portfolio that has been brought together. When the Minister for Public Health, Women’s Health and Sport was in front of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee, she was absolutely right to say that public health is the responsibility of every minister. I give an absolute assurance that the good work that we are doing in our portfolio—and, more important, the Deputy First Minister’s work in bringing together cabinet secretaries and ministers across portfolios—is having an impact. Much of that work is inspired by the work of Sir Michael Marmot, who gave a helpful contribution to the committee, as Gillian Martin mentioned.

The committee’s report refers to racialised health inequalities, which Siobhian Brown talked about. We know that not everybody has been impacted equally by the pandemic or the cost crisis. We have heard from a number of members about the importance of recognising intersectionality. I give an absolute assurance that tackling racialised health inequalities and issues relating to intersectionality is at the forefront of our minds in the Scottish Government.

We need effective and collaborative leadership to tackle the issues robustly and to achieve the outcomes that we desire for our people and communities. I am committed to playing my role in that endeavour, using the powers that are available to us, and I promise to work not just across the chamber but with other Governments, including the UK Government, and local government. There is an appetite for change among all of us in the chamber, and I commit to working with anyone who wishes to reduce the health inequalities that, sadly, still exist in Scotland.

15:24

**Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con):** We have a serious problem in Scotland with health inequalities. The committee's report makes for uncomfortable reading. Simply not enough is being done to improve health outcomes in the most deprived communities. According to Public Health Scotland, Scots die younger than our neighbours in other western European countries, and those who live in our poorest communities are three times more likely to die by suicide, twice as likely to have a mental health condition, four times more likely to suffer an alcohol-specific death and 15 times more likely to suffer a drug-related death.

The committee's report homes in on the many factors that cause, impact on or exacerbate mental health and health inequalities, which include housing, education, access to social and cultural opportunities, employment, income and social security. We heard from the health convener, and in taking evidence, that the Scottish Government has no overarching strategy for tackling health inequalities. That is why the committee's report calls on the Scottish Government to set out in detail what it is doing within its devolved competence to tackle poverty as a public health issue.

I take the opportunity to highlight areas that should be prioritised for action. On housing, the committee heard compelling evidence of the essential connection between access to safe, secure and affordable housing and positive health and wellbeing outcomes. However, the 2022-23 budget, led by the Scottish National Party, slashed £5 million from the core housing budget. More than 32,000 adults and 14,000 children are registered homeless in Scotland, and almost 100,000 children, as well as 230,000 adults, are on Scotland's social housing waiting list. Despite strong SNP Government rhetoric in support of action to tackle inequalities, the evidence of what is happening in our communities tells a different story.

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** I thank my committee colleague for taking an intervention. People who gave evidence to us said that the universal credit uplift should be reinstated—that is one of the things that came out in the report. If the member is saying that we should do more to help people in Scotland, that is one of the things that could help. I am interested in knowing why the Conservative members did not support the report's recommendation on that uplift.

**Sandesh Gulhane:** It is clear that the UK Government put in an increase for the Covid times, which was quite right.

The committee recognises the benefit of giving local government the autonomy to innovate and

explore new ways of tackling health inequalities through affordable housing and transport, improved town planning, access to green space, prioritising health in planning applications and investing in wellbeing communities. We should support councils with some of those areas, because local government knows what will work best for its communities.

Our committee recognises the important role of education in addressing societal and health inequalities. In 2016, the First Minister promised on the record to end the discrepancy in results between the richest and the poorest schoolchildren, which she said was her "defining mission". Six years on, the attainment gap is wider than that in 2018-19. Grand statements and no delivery will not cut it. The SNP-led Government should be laser focused on delivering for Scotland—it has substantial powers and it is responsible for education, transport, health and housing.

We cannot discuss health inequalities without a focus on health. People in the most deprived areas are now expected to live a healthy life for 24 years less than people in the least deprived ones will, which is in part linked to higher levels of smoking, obesity and alcohol consumption in the poorer areas. In other words, Scots from our poorest areas are not as healthy, so they will rely more on our health services.

The poor stewardship of our NHS is exacerbating the health inequalities. Any figure that we look at has reached its worst-ever level. Cancer waiting times are the longest on record—a patient in Shetland waited almost two years for cancer treatment; the average number of delayed discharges is at its worst-ever level; and only two thirds of children are receiving mental health treatment within 18 weeks. The SNP-led Government has cut £400 million from the health and social care budget and cut £65 million from the primary care budget.

**Humza Yousaf:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Sandesh Gulhane:** Briefly.

**Humza Yousaf:** We had to reprofile £400 million across the budget because my budget is now worth £650 million less as a result of the economic incompetence of the member's party. If he does not think that we should have taken money away from those services, where should we have taken it from to afford record pay deals? Those deals are the reason why nurses are not going on strike in Scotland but will do so tomorrow in England, which his party controls.

I also say to Sandesh Gulhane that he needs to come up with credible solutions—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** No. Dr Gulhane, you can have some of that time back.

**Humza Yousaf:** —on where we reprofile that money.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Sit down, please, cabinet secretary.

**Sandesh Gulhane:** Well, £1.5 billion from the national care service would be a fantastic start. Plus, let us be absolutely clear that we know that the Scottish National Party is not very good when it comes to statistics and telling us what is actually happening. The money to which the cabinet secretary refers is not the type of money that has been lost. The SNP-led Government has cut £400 million from the health and social care budget; £65 million from the primary care budget; £38 million from the mental health budget; £70 million from the social care budget; and £5 million from GP support.

Scotland has the highest drug deaths rate in western Europe. We have terrible rates of addiction. In 2021, there were 1,330 drug-related deaths in Scotland. Those drug deaths expose serious inequalities. People in the most deprived areas are 15 times more likely to die from drug misuse than those in the least deprived areas, and that gap has widened in the past two decades.

Let us consider some solutions. Our proposed right to recovery bill would give people the statutory right to addiction and recovery treatments. To make it easier for people in deprived areas to have health problems diagnosed, let us roll out mobile testing facilities and take healthcare to the people. For example, we could conduct computed tomography scans in areas with high deprivation levels to identify lung cancer earlier. The Scottish Government needs to up its game to reduce smoking, and it especially needs to look at e-cigarettes and heated tobacco products. We need to maintain funding for smoking prevention and cessation services. We reiterate our calls for community link workers to be embedded across all GP surgeries in Scotland.

The committee's "Tackling health inequalities in Scotland" report is an important piece of work. We must ensure that it does not gather dust and that concrete actions are put in place as a matter of urgency. I thank the convener and members of the committee and all the witnesses who were invited to our meetings.

I declare an interest as a registered NHS GP.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I remind members that we are tight for time. I encourage interventions, but I also encourage members to make them as brief as possible.

15:31

**Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab):** I thank all my colleagues on the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee for the work that they put into the report, and I thank all those who gave evidence to the committee on the reality of health inequalities in our communities.

I am pleased to open the debate on behalf of Scottish Labour. My party and I fully support the recommendations of the report; indeed, I would go further and say that it is essential. We recognise that the issue of health inequalities is one of the most significant political issues that we can address in the Parliament. To allow health inequalities in Scotland to have such a detrimental impact is to prevent our country from growing, progressing and improving. Health inequalities hold back people and communities and, if the Parliament fails to recognise the scale of the challenge, they will hold back a nation.

Before I move on, I must speak about the scale of the problem that we face. In Scotland, women from more affluent areas are more likely to attend screening appointments than women in our most deprived areas. Suicide rates and cancer rates are higher in our most deprived areas than they are in our most affluent areas. As described in a recent report from the University of Glasgow, the gap in life expectancy between the most and least deprived areas has actually worsened. That is shocking and it should worry all of us in the chamber.

That gives a picture of a country whose Governments are letting it down and where the poorest pay the price of neglectful governance. I therefore welcome the recognition in paragraph 354 of the report, which states:

"The Committee considers that policy action to date has been insufficient to address health inequalities and therefore concludes that additional action is urgently needed across all levels of Government to resolve this."

No one can speak about health inequalities without condemning the policy of austerity. It was widely accepted and acknowledged in the evidence that was given to the committee that austerity drives health inequalities and causes undue harm to our most deprived communities. The current attack on the poor by the Tories must be addressed if we are ever to make far-reaching changes to address health inequalities in this country.

Along with other members on the Labour benches, I will continue to fight Tory cuts and attacks on the poor. We will do that not only by attacking the abhorrent record of the Tories in power, but by highlighting the positive impact that a Labour Government could make in this country. However, the reality is that my job in this place is

to ensure that the Scottish Government is meeting its responsibility to our citizens, and it is this Government's responsibility to do all that it can to change the downward trajectory.

There are a lot of things on which the Scottish Government must act. If it fails to do that, it will let down many people who would benefit greatly from serious reform. In Parliament, we regularly hear plenty of warm words from the cabinet secretary and Government ministers, but we do not see enough action to seriously tackle health inequalities.

Having said that, I am confident that, with the right approach and good will, we can take into account the testimony of the experts who came to the committee. We heard from them about important matters such as access to safe and secure housing; whether we are efficiently using our housing stock; embedding community link workers in all our GP surgeries; maximising welfare; and eliminating barriers to employment. Those are just a few of the issues on which there are very necessary recommendations in the committee's report—which, despite being far from exhaustive, is a positive step in the right direction.

The Scottish Government can and must do more. It is undeniable that we are facing economic challenges due to national and international pressures, but now is the time to stand up rather than hide behind excuses. It is perfectly clear—we received a detailed plan on the issue from the Scottish Trades Union Congress this week—that there are significant levers that the Scottish Government can use to increase pay, especially in the public sector. That is the most obvious and impactful contribution that we could make to improve economic outcomes and, with that, reduce health inequalities.

Roz Foyer, the general secretary of the STUC said:

"This isn't a question of ability, it's a question of ambition and political will. I'm fed up listening to the Scottish Government playing the Westminster blame game. Simply being better than the UK Government isn't good enough."

Roz Foyer is right. That is not good enough; that is a low bar with which to make a comparison. We in Scotland can do better.

I remind Parliament that the solution to health inequalities lies largely in widening opportunities and increasing the provision of services so that they reach every community in the land regardless of wealth or whether someone benefits from a postcode lottery.

We all accept that inequalities are complex and multifaceted, and they cannot be solved with a single policy or initiative. Health inequalities are everybody's business. I support the committee's call for cross-party and cross-portfolio

engagement on the issue. If that can move us one step closer to eradicating health inequalities, which is what the report intends to achieve, my Labour colleagues and I will work with all parties to deliver that change.

15:37

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** It gives me great pleasure to rise for the Scottish Liberal Democrats to support today's motion. I am grateful to the committee for bringing this debate to the chamber. It is debates such as this one, in which we see the intersectionality of the issues that we are here to discuss—given that health inequalities manifest in the work of every committee of this Parliament—that show Parliament at its best. I commend each of the conveners for their remarks.

Martin Luther King said:

"Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health is the most shocking and the most inhuman".

It is also, largely, the most preventable. We in this country are rightly proud of our national health service and we rightly celebrate and reaffirm its ethos of high-quality care that is free at the point of need. We should be proud of that, but we must never be complacent, for although much of our health system might be envied around the world, there is not always equality of access to healthcare for everyone in this country. Health outcomes are certainly anything but equal.

Last year, National Records of Scotland revealed that those who are born in the most deprived areas can expect 24 fewer years of good health than those who are born in the least deprived areas. It also revealed that disadvantaged people spend around a third of their lives in poor health and that the most deprived groups face barriers when booking medical appointments and seeking treatment.

As members will know, I represent Muirhouse in Edinburgh, which is one of the most deprived communities in Scotland—it is regularly in the top five according to the Scottish index of multiple deprivation. Muirhouse Medical Group is the highest ranked of the deep-end GP practices in the country. I am proud to represent that dynamic and beautiful community.

I make a point of going to Muirhouse Medical Group every six months to hear about health inequalities. On my last visit there, I was struck by a question that the lead partner asked me. He asked, "In a practice that serves roughly 10,000 people, how many patients with dementia or Alzheimer's do you think we have?" I hazarded a guess of a couple of hundred. He said, "It's a handful—it is barely 50." That is because nobody really makes it to dementia age, because of the



manifest co-morbidities and the grinding poverty that is faced by so many people in that part of the community. That is a stark example.

For the most alarming evidence of health disparities, one need look no further than some cancer outcomes. Those in the most deprived areas are more likely to get cancer, more likely to be diagnosed later and more likely to die. A Public Health Scotland report that was published just last month found that cancer mortality rates in the most deprived areas are a staggering 74 per cent higher than those in the least deprived areas, and there are almost 5,000 extra cancer cases each year as a direct result of socioeconomic deprivation.

There is even inequality when it comes to accessing NHS treatments. If we take NHS dentistry as an example, we have seen the emergence over time of a two-tier system of those who can afford private dental work and those who cannot. Disinterest and inaction have allowed that problem to fester, and now one person in five who are unable to get an appointment are turning to do-it-yourself dentistry. Imagine how horrific that must be. That is a shocking state of affairs in 21st century Scotland, and it is why my party voted at its conference in October to reform the NHS dentistry funding structure in order to incentivise dentists to take on and treat NHS patients.

We must not forget the postcode lottery that, sadly, still exists in maternity services in the north of Scotland. Expectant mothers in Moray and Caithness are forced to endure a dangerous and nightmarish journey to Raigmore, sometimes in the snow and in the dark, to give birth. That means an incredibly anxious car journey over icy roads during winter. Despite repeated calls from my colleague at Westminster, Jamie Stone MP, the Scottish Government has yet to conduct a safety audit of that huge change in service to Caithness patients. That audit will come too late for the newborn who suffered brain damage after travelling three hours by car between Wick and Raigmore in October, when an ambulance was never even offered to the family. The health board in that case was forced to apologise to the family, and rightly so.

It goes without saying that nobody should have to face that level of increased risk simply because of where they live. Everyone should have equal access to high-quality, localised maternity services.

At the root of that problem is the asset stripping of local communities that we have seen this Government commit. The Government has continued to prove that it prefers to spend money on huge centralised bureaucracies rather than take the decisive action that will make a difference to people's outcomes today.

As we heard in committee, there is a huge link between health and poverty. Income inequality often leads to health inequality, and the knock-on impact on mental health cannot be overstated. Those in financial difficulty are more likely to suffer poor mental health, and the mental health of parents has a significant impact on the wellbeing and life chances of children and adolescents in their care. I fear that the longer that Scots are forced to endure the cost of living crisis, the more obvious and tragic the impacts of poverty will become. Those people join the longest waiting lists for care in our NHS.

The Government must redouble its efforts to tackle rising poverty. It must treat that as the public health issue that it is, and give people the treatment that they need when their mental health fails them. Shamefully, all the evidence suggests that health inequalities in Scotland are continuing to grow.

I am coming to the end of my time. I finish with the words of the former Prime Minister of Barbados, Owen Arthur, who once said:

"he who has health, has hope; and he who has hope, has everything."

We need to give the people of Scotland some new hope.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to the open debate, and I remind members that speeches will be five minutes, rather than the usual four or six minutes.

15:44

**Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP):** As a member of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee, I would like to thank all participants for sharing their time and expertise throughout the inquiry.

Our committee found that unjust and avoidable health inequalities are widening across Scotland. They are systemic and intertwined with other forms of inequality and, as we have heard today, poverty.

Dr Sharon Wright from the University of Glasgow, along with 74 other respondents, told us that poverty drives health inequalities. Poverty has wide-ranging and dire consequences for health, and the Westminster cost of living crisis is having a disproportionate negative impact on those who are already experiencing health inequalities.

Marie Curie shared stories of terminally ill people in Scotland who are struggling with bills and having to "rough it" through the winter. A terminal illness comes with extra use of energy for heating and specialist equipment. Dr David Walsh of the Glasgow Centre for Population Health told our committee:

“You can ... trace the effects of austerity through well-understood pathways to—ultimately and tragically—early death.”—[*Official Report, Health, Social Care and Sport Committee*, 24 May 2022; c 12.]

As the cabinet secretary has highlighted, the most damning statistic of all is that life expectancy has fallen as a direct result of the UK Government’s austerity policies.

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

**Evelyn Tweed:** Not at this time—I might do later on.

Research that was led by the Glasgow Centre for Population Health and the University of Glasgow shows that austerity has led to almost 20,000 excess deaths in Scotland and that people who live in the poorest areas are hardest hit. In fact, the study found that there was a total of 335,000 excess deaths across Scotland, England and Wales between 2012 and 2019. Conservative policies have helped to shorten life expectancy for people across the UK, as well as diminishing the quality of their lives.

During our evidence gathering, we heard from multiple experts that the most effective method of relieving poverty and thus improving health outcomes is putting money in the hands of those who need it. Scotland is making huge progress on that. As the Joseph Rowntree Foundation said,

“The full rollout of the Scottish Child Payment is a watershed moment for tackling poverty in Scotland, and the rest of the UK should take notice.”

The Child Poverty Action Group said:

“If the Scottish government can make this kind of serious investment in protecting our children from poverty then so too can the UK government.”

Much is being done to mitigate health inequalities, but there is one clear fact that is driven by the data, not politics, which is that the most effective remedies for tackling poverty remain outwith the control of the Scottish Government.

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

**Evelyn Tweed:** No, not at this time.

Many of the experts we spoke to were unequivocal in their view that Scotland’s ability to remedy health inequality is extremely limited while we remain part of the UK. For example, the experts told us that benefits that are under the control of Westminster—

**Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Evelyn Tweed:** No, not at this time.

The experts told us that those benefits are among the most effective ways of delivering support to low-income families.

I am tired of the Labour Party’s continual attacks on the Scottish health service, when Scotland’s health service is clearly performing better than that of Labour-controlled Wales. Now, Labour and Sir Keir Starmer are enthusiastic backers of Brexit, which, as well as doing so much to damage our economy, is depriving the health and care sectors of desperately needed staff.

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

**Evelyn Tweed:** No, I will not—I have more to say.

We have heard that poverty and health inequalities are inextricably linked. The Scottish Government will continue to support people in poverty, but we could do so much more with independence. The result of the most recent Holyrood elections demonstrated, and all the recent polls confirm, that the people of Scotland recognise that. If the Opposition parties in the Parliament were really serious about working collaboratively to tackle health inequality in Scotland, they should be joining us to demand that Scotland’s people have the right to choose their own future.

15:49

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** Okay. It is back to reality.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak in the debate and I do so as the co-convenor of the cross-party group on health inequalities.

Health inequalities are a tremendously important topic to me and I welcome the chance to discuss the work that I, five of my MSP colleagues and nearly 100 external organisations—including third sector organisations, health boards, other public bodies, academic institutions and royal colleges—have done to raise awareness of the causes of health inequalities, promote evidence-based actions that reduce them and avoid legislation and policies that make health inequalities in Scotland worse.

Over the past year, the cross-party group has met to consider a range of topics, including the inverse care law, socioeconomic impacts on children’s activity levels and mental health. Despite our work to draw attention to the needs of the underserved and marginalised groups and their evidence-based solutions, we are all aware that the Covid-19 pandemic has starkly brought attention to the realities of the gap in health outcomes between different population groups, particularly the rich and the poor.

The NHS rate of recovery from the pandemic, twinned with the cost of living crisis, is alarming. Both of those risk widening the health inequalities gap further.

When we discuss health inequalities, it is important to ensure that we are not focused entirely on the outcomes of health inequalities but also look at the broader reasons for those inequalities outside of healthcare. We should also recognise that there have always been and always will be inequalities. The question is, at what level are inequalities acceptable and what can we do to tackle the societal inequalities that we are able to address?

With that in mind, I will talk once again about the significant role that the preventative health agenda could and should play. For example, housing people with respiratory conditions in damp, poorly insulated housing will inevitably lead to them spending more time in hospital, with that cost coming out of the NHS budget rather than the housing budget. In fact, housing anyone in damp, poorly insulated housing will lead to more people with respiratory conditions.

That highlights where the Scottish Government has failed to think and act across portfolios. We either invest in better-quality housing, heating and insulation or we spend the money on the healthcare of people who do not have that quality housing. It all comes out of the same Scottish Government budget. It is just a question of what page in the ledger the investment will appear on.

The Scottish healthcare system is funded to provide healthcare on demand rather than on need. It is reactive more than proactive and preventative. It must be encouraged to change and evolve.

**Gillian Martin:** I absolutely agree with everything that Brian Whittle says about good-quality housing. Is he supportive of the moves to build more social housing in Scotland? Does the Conservative Party support that?

**Brian Whittle:** Of course we do. It is crucial that we do that but, if we cut the budget to social housing, we will build less. Therefore, the cost will come out of the healthcare budget. That is what I am trying to say.

Scotland is the unhealthiest country in Europe and the unhealthiest small country in the world. That is a major reason why we have such stark health inequality data. We have such a poor record on conditions such as obesity, levels of which in Scotland are among the highest in the developed world. That condition is likely to result in rising levels of type 2 diabetes, colon cancer and hypertension.

Declining levels of physical activity and sedentary lifestyles were highlighted in a report as a factor in the rising obesity levels in Scotland, affecting the lower SIMD areas more acutely. That report also talked about changes in diet—including the availability of cheap, energy-dense food—as a factor. It also said that people were walking less, car use was up and people's jobs were less active. According to Obesity Action Scotland, the average body mass index of the Scottish population has been rising steadily since 1995 and gone from 26 to 28. More than half of children in Scotland living with obesity are at risk of severe obesity, which costs the health budget billions.

Those conditions are certainly exacerbated by poverty, with life expectancy varying hugely in Scotland. Even within the city of Glasgow, life expectancy can vary by more than 20 years within just a few miles. However, those conditions are preventable. That is why I am passionate about ensuring that physical activity should play a much bigger part in our education system. It is why nutritional education should play a much bigger part.

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

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** No, he is winding up.

**Brian Whittle:** When we discuss free school meals, we should ensure that pupils have a much greater part in the development of the menu.

The Scottish Government health strategy, education strategy and housing strategy are some of the reasons why health inequalities persist. We must join up the dots and think across portfolios. That is the only way we can improve Scotland's report card.

15:55

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** I thank everybody who was involved in the inquiry. I am a member of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee. The health inequalities inquiry, as we have heard, has involved numerous parliamentary committees and it has shown us one crucial factor—that the Scottish Government is doing everything that it can to tackle the root causes of poverty and associated poor health. However, it has one hand tied behind its back in not having control over the relevant reserved powers.

Tory policies at Westminster are having negative and long-lasting consequences that directly impact on the health of low-income households here in Scotland—that is clear and it is based on evidence. Game-changing policies such as the £25 per week Scottish child payment can only do so much when the Tories continue to inflict

harm on the most vulnerable people in our society—namely, those who rely on the state safety net. That safety net is being systematically dismantled by the Westminster Government.

**Brian Whittle:** Does the member accept that the Scottish Government has total control of the biggest tools in the toolbox to tackle health inequalities, which are health and education? The SNP is failing in both those areas. *[Interruption.]*

**Emma Harper:** The member is still trying to intervene from a sedentary position. The bottom line is that we dinnae have control of the budget. We need the finance to deliver what we need in order to tackle poverty and address health inequalities.

The committee's report shows that successive UK Conservative Governments, particularly in the 1980s and from 2010 onwards, insisted on austerity agendas and slashed welfare payments and public services. It is important to state that austerity is

"difficult economic conditions created by government measures to reduce public expenditure."

It is caused by policy choices.

**Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Emma Harper:** I have only five minutes.

The report reflects that the austerity agenda has caused continued and immense damage to the health of the poorest and most vulnerable. Austerity has been an economic failure and a health failure. During our inquiry, we heard how experts from the Glasgow Centre of Population Health showed that nearly 20,000 excess deaths in Scotland were likely to have been caused by UK Government economic policy. Tory austerity policies have likely caused more deaths in Scotland than Covid-19. *[Interruption.]*

Here is the evidence that members might want tae listen tae. Dr David Walsh from the Glasgow Centre of Population Health said:

"we must remember that these are more than just statistics: they represent hundreds of thousands of people whose lives have been cut short, and hundreds of thousands of families who have had to deal with the grief and aftermath of those deaths."

**Sue Webber:** Will the member give way?

**Emma Harper:** I am continuing with my evidence; I will run out of time if I take another intervention.

The United Nations poverty envoy, Olivier De Schutter, has warned that another wave of austerity might violate UK human rights obligations and increase hunger and malnutrition. Matthew Taylor, chief executive of the NHS Confederation, said:

"The country is facing a humanitarian crisis. Many people could face the awful choice between skipping meals to heat their homes and having to live in cold, damp and very unpleasant conditions."

Since Matthew Taylor stated that, we have seen the reality of eating versus heating. It is not a choice any more, because folk are not heating their homes and they are missing meals—families are omitting their meals.

Gillian Martin mentioned that the inquiry shaped the committee's many recommendations in employment, education, housing, social security, public services and health—many portfolios are covered. Fundamentally, the recommendations call for urgent co-ordinated action across all levels of government in the UK to tackle health inequalities in Scotland.

The committee was particularly concerned that the rising cost of living will have a more negative impact on those groups that are already experiencing health inequalities, including those living in poverty and those with a disability.

One of the key findings is that there is no overarching, national strategy for tackling health inequalities in Scotland, but the evidence submitted to our inquiry showed many instances where the design and delivery of public services may exacerbate inequalities rather than reduce them.

It is clear from our report that many causes of health inequalities lie with policies made at Westminster, so I welcome the Government's commitment to accept the majority of the committee's recommendations, and we will work together to tackle health inequalities in Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I remind the chamber that it is up to members whether they take an intervention, and if they do not take one, it is not an invitation to shout the intervention from a sedentary position.

16:00

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** Health inequalities are a symptom of an unequal society rather than a cause—a point that many members have made during the debate. There are inequalities in our health service, but those are because of the underlying societal issues.

I live in Inverness, and from my home I can walk 15 minutes in one direction and then 15 minutes in the other direction and, sadly, the difference in life expectancy between those two communities—which are separated by a 30-minute walk—is almost two decades. Those in the wealthy area live nearly 20 years longer than those in the less affluent community. Those people were born in the same hospital and educated by the same council,

and they live in the same city; the only difference is their access to wealth.

People with a reasonable income can live in warm homes, enjoy nutritious food and focus on the education of their children as well as their own opportunities. People who do not have a reasonable income live in cold, damp homes and eat a poor diet, and the education of their children is secondary to their survival. They have no opportunities, and they are therefore more liable to become unwell and to suffer harms that damage their mental and physical health. Therefore, they have a shorter life expectancy. It is absolutely unfair that those people also have poorer health services.

General practitioners who work in our most deprived areas tell of the challenges that they face while working in those communities. Lack of money and opportunity also diminishes people's expectations of their health services. They do not expect to be able to access services, and they often cannot afford to access services due to the cost and availability of transport. That lack of expectation of a reasonable outcome can cause mental health issues and lead to self-medication and addiction.

Drugs and alcohol also shorten lives. Women are more likely to earn less due to the gender pay gap and have greater caring responsibilities. Therefore, in order to deal with health inequalities, we need to deal with societal inequalities, which are the root cause. It is often easy to see those divides in cities by identifying postcodes where low incomes and poor health outcomes are prevalent, but it is much more difficult to do that in rural communities where the wealthy live side by side with the poor.

The Highlands and Islands Enterprise report "A minimum Income for Remote Rural Scotland" points out that a minimum income for a reasonable standard of living is between a tenth and a third more in rural areas than it is in urban areas. The report tells us:

"The additional costs come from a range of sources. In particular, the costs of travelling, heating one's home and paying for goods and their delivery are much higher for many residents of the areas under review, especially those in the remotest areas."

Therefore, interventions that target geographical areas do not work for the rural poor and the Scottish Government passes the buck to the UK Government. Its policies have, of course, made the situation worse, but the Scottish Government continues to ignore its own responsibilities.

With regard to heating, the Scottish Government now insists that all new heating boilers that are off the gas grid and funded under Government schemes should be heat pumps. In order to use a

heat pump, people need to invest tens of thousands of pounds in the insulation of their home—which is money that people simply do not have. I spoke to someone who had recently had a heat pump fitted in an old house. They said that putting on the heating was pointless because it was hugely expensive and did not provide any warmth at all. The Scottish Government needs to take responsibility for that and design its policies accordingly, because it is now responsible for people freezing in their own homes. It is also responsible for potential interventions that could lift people out of poverty.

The Scottish Labour Party proposed improvements to the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill that would have enshrined the right to food in the act, but that was voted down. We also tried to make the Scottish Food Commission responsible for realising that right, but—again—that was voted down. The Scottish Government is directly responsible for that.

We all aspire to live in a country where those basic human rights are met, and it is to our shame that they are not. So, I welcome the committee's report and I hope that it pushes the Scottish Government to act to make Scotland a fairer country. If it does that, it will begin to tackle health inequalities.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Ms Grant.

I remind members that those who are participating in a debate are expected to be in the chamber for opening and closing speeches and that, if you have made a speech, you are required to be in the chamber for at least two speeches after that. I notice that that has not been adhered to by a couple of colleagues, which is disappointing.

16:06

**Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP):** As we have heard throughout the debate and in the evidence of experts to the committee's informative inquiry, health inequalities are symptoms, not causes, and we must tackle the causes. As expert witnesses to the committee said, devolution policies have helped to tackle those inequalities but much more needs to be done, and the finding in the report that a decade of austerity is behind stalling improvements in life expectancy must make us all angry.

Health inequalities reflect the values of the state, and we currently have a state that enables the likes of Michelle Mone and her family to make millions from Covid contracts during a pandemic that laid bare the health inequalities for all to see and many to suffer from. Poverty does not recognise a person's age or that they are a child.

No child should suffer health inequalities as a result of living in poverty, but life chances, health, and cognitive, linguistic and childhood development are all affected by a person's start in life.

When giving evidence to the committee, Professor Gerry McCartney said:

"We know that health inequalities are a result of inequalities in income, wealth and power in society and it is because those inequalities have continued to widen that health inequalities have continued to widen."—[*Official Report, Health, Social Care and Sport Committee*, 24 May 2022; c 3.]

Jaki Lambert, the director of the Royal College of Midwives in Scotland, recently commented that she is now seeing health inequalities starting to be the cause of increasing deaths of mothers who have recently given birth and that countries such as Denmark, which are better at tackling inequalities, are not seeing that. The worst start in life for someone must be to lose their mother.

The Scottish Government continues to drive to reduce childhood inequalities. Introducing the Scottish child payment and increasing it to £25 per week for all eligible under-16s is a long-term measure but one that will be a lifeline to many families this winter. In West Lothian, 7,105 applications for the Scottish child payment have been submitted from families as of 30 September this year, and many more families will be eligible with the extension of the payment to under-16s. The new parental employability support and the best start grant—which are also available only in Scotland—are also increasing household incomes in order to improve family wellbeing.

Children need access to safe, secure, affordable housing, as that leads to more positive health outcomes. That is why I welcome the Scottish Government's affordable housing supply programme, which prioritises tackling child poverty and will deliver 110,000 more affordable, energy-efficient homes by 2032.

Early years stimulation, development and resilience at nursery can help children in later years, but it also enables parents and carers to work, which leads to the imperative to tackle in-work poverty and the need for a decent living wage. I welcome the Scottish Government's recent announcement that it will introduce measures to ensure that businesses and organisations that receive public funds pay the living wage.

The voluntary sector also plays an important role, and, with estimates that 8,740 children were living in relative poverty in 2019-20 in West Lothian, the pioneering West Lothian school bank and the West Lothian financial inclusion network,

with a Christmas present shoe box appeal, also help families.

However, it does not have to be that way. It is clear that the Scottish Government is using the limited resources and powers that are available to it to take a wide and connected approach to tackling inequality and dealing with child poverty in Scotland. The majority of powers that are required to address economic inequalities are reserved to Westminster, which presides over one of the worst levels of inequalities in the G20. As long as economic inequalities continue to widen, so too will health inequalities.

**Craig Hoy:** Before the Covid pandemic, the Institute for Government said that an independent Scotland with full powers over every area of policy in Scotland would immediately face an £8 billion black hole. What will it be: £8 billion in spending cuts—SNP austerity—or £8 billion in tax increases?

**Fiona Hyslop:** Mr Hoy should be ashamed of the state of the UK and its economic experience, which put Scotland in the position of having to deal with any problem whatsoever in its economy. The UK Government's recent stewardship leaves a lot to be desired. I am sincerely concerned about the impact of that and how it will affect inequality among my constituents.

The UK Government should use its powers over employment law and many work-related benefits to reduce inequalities. The committee's report quite rightly states that health inequality cannot be viewed in isolation, which has been echoed in the debate. In order to reduce health inequalities in Scotland, we must work to ensure that no child in Scotland lives in poverty. I want a Scotland that can use the powers of independence with a value system that tackles and does not perpetuate inequalities.

We cannot—we must not—rest until there is no child in Scotland who is living in poverty. Only by working to make that a reality will we end health inequality and give the children of Scotland the health, equality and life chances that they deserve.

16:11

**Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green):** I thank committee colleagues, clerks, the people who gave evidence and all those who sent in briefings ahead of the debate. The committee's report is hugely wide ranging and covers many more issues than I can do justice to in five minutes.

I know that colleagues across the chamber will—as I do—have numerous constituents who are faced with overlapping and intersectional health inequalities. Inequalities do not exist in a

silo and I am pleased by the steps that have been taken in the chamber to acknowledge health inequalities holistically. As we heard, wealth inequality is the biggest factor that impacts on health outcomes; given the current cost of living crisis, it is likely that that will be made worse, in the short term.

As many other members have said, we cannot get through a debate on health inequalities without mentioning austerity. The Scottish Greens would like to see implementation of a universal basic income; however, given the powers that are currently available to Parliament, we welcome the work that is being done to implement a basic income guarantee. I would welcome an update from the minister, in closing, on what, in addition to that, is currently being done to support low-income households to maintain their health and wellbeing.

As the convener of the cross-party group on stroke, it would be remiss of me not to mention the important statistics related to deprivation and stroke prevalence. There is a strong relationship between deprivation and stroke mortality. That is particularly true in the under-65 age group, in which the standardised mortality rate is over four times higher for the most deprived 10 per cent of the population than it is for the least deprived 10 per cent of the population. The death rate in 2020 for cerebrovascular disease in the most deprived areas was 43 per cent higher than it was in the least deprived areas, which was consistent with the figures for the previous five years.

The association between mortality and deprivation was stronger in the under-65 age category than in the over-65 age category. In the under-65s, there is a clear pattern of correlation between the SMR and the deprivation decile. The SMR in the under-65 age category was 86 per cent above the Scottish average in the most deprived 10 per cent of the population, whereas the SMR in the under-65 age category in the least deprived 10 per cent of the population was 61 per cent below the Scottish average.

As noted in Engender's briefing on women's health inequalities, women and girls still face significant and distinct barriers to having adequate mental and physical health in Scotland. Health inequalities that disproportionately affect women have historically lacked adequate funding and the professional focus that is needed to address them.

Women's health has not historically been understood and respected as it should have been. I have touched already on intersectional equality issues having a significant bearing on health outcomes, and the same is true of the effect on women. Important examples include historic ableism, racism and homophobia, which have contributed to there being unmet health needs for women of colour, disabled women and LGBT+

women. A 2017 study found that women in the most deprived areas of Scotland experience good health outcomes for 25 years less than women in the most affluent parts of the country. Inequality has also persisted across gender divides in terms of health outcomes.

A 2020 report by the Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland highlights that women consistently raise their experiences of their healthcare concerns not being listened to or not being taken seriously, and say that they are not actively involved in treatment or in planning prescription choices. As a result of that, women wait longer for pain medication than men, wait longer to be diagnosed and are more likely to have physical symptoms ascribed to mental health issues, as well as being more likely to have heart disease misdiagnosed or to become disabled after a stroke.

We must remember that each and every portfolio across Government has an impact on health in one way or another. The impact of poverty and the added pressure of the cost of living crisis on mental health cannot be understated.

In its briefing, the Mental Health Foundation said that,

"In November, new evidence emerged on the negative mental health effects of the cost of living crisis, in a poll conducted for the Foundation by Opinium. The Foundation found that when they were asked about the past month, one in nine ... adults in Scotland were feeling hopeless about their financial situation, four in 10 ... were feeling anxious and one third ... were feeling stressed. This research on a representative sample of 1,000 adults in Scotland is worrying and shows the early signs of the negative mental health impact of the 'cost of living crisis' ... The effects of adversity are cumulative; those who have already experienced stress due to the recession of 2008, prior poverty, other adversity and/or the COVID-19 pandemic will be at higher risk if they also experience financial stress due to the Cost of Living Crisis."

Today's debate is on the committee's report, but it is actually about how we switch to a preventative health agenda, thereby reducing the ill health that people experience and increasing their ability to stay well. We have a way to go to move to truly preventative health approaches that reach as many people as possible, and more work needs to be done to ensure that people in low-income households attend appointments, such as those for cancer screening and vaccination. We need to ensure that, for carers, there are flexible appointments, and that the time spent at and cost of getting to those appointments are not barriers.

However, we should not underestimate the ability of preventative approaches to make a difference. We know the impact they have had on mortality rates.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You need to wind up now, Ms Mackay.

**Gillian Mackay:** I apologise, Presiding Officer. There is a lot more that I could have got through, but I will end by again thanking committee colleagues and those who gave evidence.

16:17

**Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con):** I thank the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee for its wide-ranging and impactful report. The report was published by that committee, but the debate goes way beyond the realms and remit of public health. The causes and implications of health inequality are spread over a far broader public-policy canvas that covers housing, communities and planning, access to social and cultural opportunities, education and early years development and, of course, employment and the need to secure a growth-based economy in which everyone has access to skills development and well-paid employment. If we fail in those areas, we will fail to tackle the underlying causes of health inequality. As the Scottish Parliament information centre notes,

“the fundamental causes of health inequalities lie largely outside the health system; health inequalities are a symptom rather than the cause of the problem”.

The Health, Social Care and Sport Committee is concerned by evidence that, despite

“strong rhetoric in support of action to tackle them, the level of health inequalities in Scotland remains higher than in England”

The responsibility for the failure to combat poverty in Scotland rests with all political parties over decades; my Conservative Party, the Labour Party and now the Scottish National Party. However, we cannot escape the simple fact that the SNP has been in government here at Holyrood for 15 years. This is happening on its watch, so I say to the minister that blaming Westminster simply will not wash.

**Carol Mochan:** Can Craig Hoy touch on how austerity affects communities? There are lots of reports on the issue; a recent one from Glasgow is clear that austerity is driving most of the health inequalities that we have.

**Craig Hoy:** Scotland has the largest settlement from Westminster that it has ever had, and has control over welfare powers and employment, and the way to tackle austerity and poverty in the long term is to ensure that we get people in a position—

**Humza Yousaf:** So, austerity has had no impact.

**Craig Hoy:** The cabinet secretary is saying that austerity has had no impact—

**Humza Yousaf:** Austerity has had a major impact.

**Craig Hoy:** I remind him of the fact that he is advocating independence, which would lead to £8 billion-worth of austerity.

We must remember that the Covid pandemic has shone a light on the severity of health inequalities in Scotland today. Death rates among people from deprived backgrounds and among the south Asian community were around double the rates in the general population. Rightly, the data prompted the committee to look into the issue.

The social and economic costs of inequality are immense and are very real costs. People are living in poor health, in chronic pain, in poverty, in poor housing and with poor diet, and they face higher mortality rates.

For too long, we have written off the existence of severe pockets of deprivation in our communities as a problem that is too entrenched and tough to fix. The problem is often hidden within our communities in pockets of deprivation, which are shut away from sight, so we must shine a light on them.

The committee recognises the benefit of giving local government the authority to innovate and explore new ways to tackle health inequalities. It also notes that a lack of strategic co-ordination could exacerbate inequality, in some instances. However, if local government has a major role to play in combating inequality, it is vital that our councils be properly funded.

**Gillian Martin:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Craig Hoy:** No, I will not.

I have very real concerns that year after year of SNP cuts to housing and council budgets will have exacerbated many of the social determinants of health inequality.

To break that link, it is vital that we work across the parties in Parliament to end the depressing cycle of intergenerational poverty, because only by doing that can we set out on a different path that, as the committee knows, will save lives.

Let us take the example of cancer. Cancer-related deaths are 74 per cent higher in the most deprived communities than they are in the least deprived communities in Scotland.

**Emma Harper:** Will the member take an intervention on that point?

**Craig Hoy:** I will not give way, because I am short of time.

Around 4,900 extra cancer cases each year in Scotland are attributable to deprivation, which is



equivalent to a staggering 13 extra new cancer diagnoses in Scotland per day.

A recent report from Cancer Research UK sets out some clear recommendations. It calls on the SNP ministers and the NHS to fund and roll out interventions that tackle the known drivers of inequalities. It calls for

“bold action to diagnose cancers earlier”

and to ensure that everyone has access to the right treatments for them.

Deputy Presiding Officer—

I am sorry, I mean Presiding Officer—you snuck in without me seeing you.

Poverty remains a scar on the face of modern Scotland, and tackling it remains one of the greatest priorities that must be addressed if we are to reduce health inequalities.

We need a Scottish Government that focuses on tackling the inequalities of place across Scotland, not a Scottish Government that is obsessed with dividing the country on the constitution. We need a Scottish Government that is truly committed to reversing the in-built disadvantages that hold urban and rural Scotland back. To achieve that, we need a Scottish Government that is truly committed to improving health outcomes for everyone across Scotland today.

16:22

**Foysoyl Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab):** I pay tribute to the committee members and staff for their work in producing the report, which covers a very wide range of issues across Scottish society, under the umbrella of health inequalities. I also thank the witnesses who gave evidence to the committee, to allow it to develop the report on such an important subject.

I will focus my attention on the very welcome recommendation from the committee to treat the elimination of poverty as a public health measure. As a member of the Social Justice and Social Security Committee, I am grateful that the health committee considered our recent reports as part of its report. The report introduces itself with a history of the failed actions to reduce health inequalities in Scotland.

I am glad that the committee clearly lays out the gravity of the health inequalities that are faced in Scotland, because we do not do ourselves any favours by sugar-coating the situation. As Scottish parliamentarians, it is incumbent on all of us to find a way to tackle the distinct problem that we face.

To that end, as a co-convenor of the cross-party group on improving Scotland’s health, I am

grateful to colleagues from the CPGs on diabetes, heart and circulatory diseases, lung health and stroke for agreeing to participate in a joint inquiry into non-communicable diseases.

I am also grateful to the British Heart Foundation for supporting that work. Although NCDs are only one aspect of the health inequalities in Scotland, I am hopeful that by pooling the resources of our CPGs, we will be able to come up with recommendations to help the situation.

These inequalities are close to home. In 2018, a report found that a boy born that year in Muirhouse or West Pilton had a life expectancy that was 13 years shorter than that of a boy born in neighbouring Cramond. That is shocking, and it was so before Covid-19, which the committee’s report tells us has made health inequalities considerably worse across the board.

The most recent report from the National Records of Scotland shows that in the past 10 years, improvements in life expectancy have stalled and, most recently, have started to reverse. That reverse is put down to Covid, but the stall was not. Decreases in deaths from heart disease have slowed; deaths from drugs have risen. It is important for us all to find ways to halt and reverse those trends and to improve life expectancy in Scotland. Perhaps greater use of organisations such as the fantastic Pilton Community Health Project, which is a community wellbeing programme in north Edinburgh, can bring to bear local expertise where it might help.

The committee makes clear that, sadly, there is no magic bullet to fix those issues. It will take systemic change across a variety of systems. For example, the report highlights the way that systemic racism creates poverty, and we know that poverty leads to poorer lifelong outcomes.

In 2020, Hannah Lawrence produced a comprehensive report for Edinburgh & Lothians Regional Equality Council—ELREC—which detailed the barriers of poverty and inequality for ethnic minorities in Scotland. I draw members’ attention to my entry in the register of members’ interests—I am co-chair of ELREC.

Ethnic minorities in Scotland often face multiple overlapping disadvantages that cannot be fixed by any single initiative. As I said earlier, it is incumbent on us all to work towards fixing those problems. I thank the committee for guiding us in that work.

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** David Torrance will be the final speaker in the open debate.

16:27

**David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP):** Before I begin, I put on record my thanks to everyone who played a part in this inquiry and brought us to where we are today. There are far too many to mention, but I pay particular thanks to every single individual and organisation who took the time to contribute to our evidence sessions. Those sessions provided us with an opportunity to hear first-hand accounts of individual experiences and were invaluable to the work of the committee.

We all recognise the effect of inequality on individuals, families and communities and that a number of communities are disproportionately affected by inequality. Health inequalities are commonly understood to be unjust and avoidable differences in people's health across the population and between different groups. As noted in the report,

"It is internationally accepted that the fundamental causes of health inequalities lie largely outside the health system; health inequalities are a symptom rather than the cause of the problem"

and

"arise from the unequal distribution of income, wealth and power and the societal conditions this creates."

Through the inquiry, the committee sought to focus on

"what progress has been made ... in tackling health inequalities"

in Scotland since the 2015 report;

"what impacts additional factors ... have had on health inequalities and action to address them";

and what opportunities exist to reduce such inequalities and

"increase preventative work to tackle"

them

"before they impact on individuals' health and wellbeing".

Over the seven years since the previous report, Scotland has also faced considerable new challenges and pressures that have intensified pre-existing inequalities. Back in 2015, no one could have predicted what was around the corner and how devastating an impact, both directly and indirectly, the Covid pandemic would have on certain sections of our population. The disproportionate effect on our ethnic minority communities, people with learning disabilities, those with severe mental illness and our most vulnerable cannot be overstated.

Now, as we slowly continue the difficult recovery, we are faced with a Tory cost of living crisis that threatens to push households into vulnerable positions, increasing health inequalities and worsening health and wellbeing. Yet again,

the greatest negative impact will be felt by the groups who are already experiencing health inequalities, including those living in poverty and those with disabilities.

Matthew Taylor, chief executive of the NHS Confederation, has said:

"The country is facing a humanitarian crisis. Many people could face the awful choice between skipping meals to heat their homes and having to live in cold, damp and very unpleasant conditions. This in turn could lead to outbreaks of illness and sickness around the country and widen health inequalities, worsen children's life chances and leave an indelible scar on local communities."

In my constituency, I see the wide and varied impact of these inequalities every single day on the communities that I represent. In the past, people attending my surgeries came, in the main, to discuss general issues or to seek advice and help. That has now changed—now they come because they are scared. They come because they have very real fears about how they are going to keep their families safe and healthy. In the face of inflation that has risen out of control and astronomical energy prices, they are terrified about what the future holds.

I will touch on one of the findings from the committee's inquiry, which urges the Scottish Government to ensure that the impact on inequalities is a primary consideration in the future design and delivery of all public services. I was extremely interested to see a Fife initiative being praised and used as an example of good practice in the written response received by the committee from the Royal College of Occupational Therapists. It noted that the benefits of local-level working have been seen in Fife, where the children and young people's occupational therapy service is a key stakeholder in collaborative work to develop a new community play experience that offers invisible inclusivity. The goal is to create an environment that has no boundaries and that supports participation in play in every sense of the word.

There are so many local examples of good practice, across all our constituencies, that have a massive impact on what we all hope to achieve. I, for one, am eternally grateful to each and every one for their contribution.

Statistics consistently show that poverty and inequality impact a child's whole life, affecting their education, housing and social environment, and in turn affecting their health outcomes. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation reported that

"Boys born in low-income communities can expect, on average, 47 years of healthy life, girls, 50."

That is two decades of quality of life being taken from people solely because of where they were born.

The committee agrees that urgent action is needed to address health inequalities. However, it is clear that the UK Government's action to date to tackle health inequalities in Scotland simply has not been enough. By enforcing austerity and slashing welfare payments and public services, the Tories have caused immense damage to the health of the poorest and most vulnerable in our society.

Today I call on the Westminster Government to follow the lead of the Scottish Government, which has used the powers that it does have to ensure that people in Scotland benefit from the most generous social contract in any part of the UK. We must continue to drive national and local action through partnerships with local government, public services, the voluntary sector and our local communities. Our policies and approach must be shaped by lived experience, and they must tackle the root causes of health inequalities, because lives literally depend on it.

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

16:33

**Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab):** It has been a fascinating debate—one of perhaps two halves. It is a great pleasure to follow David Torrance, and I would encourage members, both those in the chamber and those who were unable to be here today, to read Mr Torrance's speech afterwards. I found it very powerful, as it drew on the personal experiences of what happens in his constituency, and raised the fact that there is phenomenal good practice happening around Scotland. If we had a way of pooling and sharing those practices, many of the areas that face challenges might indeed find answers from other areas. I thank David Torrance for that speech and also for his festive greeting for the holiday period when it comes, which I received during his speech.

As I said, it has been very much a debate of two halves. I would like to concentrate on the opening contributions, because to have so many conveners in the chamber speaking on a committee report is, to me, unprecedented in the 18 months that I have had the pleasure to serve here. I will also do so because of how powerful all those contributions were. Like others, I must thank the committee and the convener for the report that it produced, which makes truly frightening reading but also provides tangible recommendations, which I think and hope that the Government will find very helpful.

I will concentrate on Gillian Martin's contribution and the committee's request for an overarching strategy. The cabinet secretary talked about the

Government group that is addressing the issue, but the report is looking for something that is more formal, better understood and more wide reaching, so that the Government can be held to account. There is a difference between cabinet secretaries rightly gathering together to discuss the issue and a strategy that people outside the Parliament can see, so that they can hold the Government to account.

In Clare Adamson's powerful contribution, she talked about the role of the arts in fighting inequality. That area is frequently considered almost as an afterthought, but the art and culture of a society speak volumes about the mental wellbeing of the members of that community. Art and culture can be used to find simple answers to problems that are a challenge for individuals and to find community-wide solutions to problems. I found her contribution incredibly useful.

Siobhian Brown, the convener of the COVID-19 Recovery Committee, gave powerful testimony on the effect that Covid has had on our deprived areas. Although some of the statistics still need to be finalised, the impact that the Covid period has had on some of our poorest communities is concerning.

Natalie Don talked about child poverty and the strategies that are successful. I very much welcome her comments about disabled people.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** Does Martin Whitfield agree that, if people in more affluent communities are able to live longer, that will exacerbate the strain on our NHS and could make health inequalities worse? I am not arguing that we should not be helping people to live longer, but we need to accommodate that in our planning for the NHS.

**Martin Whitfield:** It is true that these problems are sometimes made worse by the benefits that certain people in our communities get. Obviously, we should not seek to curtail communities, but people at the other end of those communities have suffered historically for so long and continue to do so. If time allows, I will come back to that issue with a question for the minister to address in summing up the debate.

Audrey Nicoll made a powerful point about the change in the items that are shoplifted. People are now stealing to live and to feed their families; they are not stealing to make money or as a job. There is a relatively simple solution—I say that in anticipation of many emails to come—with regard to people leaving our prisons without an address and without having a GP surgery or a dental surgery to go to. Casting people back in that way to the area where they came from merely invites them to recommit crime in order just to live.

I thank the cabinet secretary for his contribution, because I feel that he recognised the challenge. We should agree on that, because the challenge that we face is huge. He mentioned the £3 billion that is being provided to help households, but Natalie Don spoke about a mother who gave evidence to her committee having to live on merely £7,000—

**Brian Whittle:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Martin Whitfield:** I am conscious of time, but I will take an intervention if it is very quick.

**Brian Whittle:** I am very grateful for the member giving way again. Does he agree that the two big tools that we have in our toolbox for tackling health inequalities are our education portfolio and our health portfolio and that we are not leveraging those enough at the moment?

**Martin Whitfield:** That intervention leads me to the issue of education. Why does the Government feel unable to agree to the committee's recommendation to conduct a survey relating to families who are unable to access early years entitlement? I recognise that the issue rests with local authorities, but the Scottish Government is best placed to establish the picture across the whole of Scotland and to find out why some families feel excluded from the system. I would like the minister, if possible, to comment on that.

Scottish Labour supports the findings of the committee's report, which is a damning indictment of the state of health inequalities across Scotland. It is a travesty that, today in Scotland, people in our poorest areas die 10 years before those in our wealthiest areas do. That outcome is not fixed when someone is born; it is not inevitable. Responsibility rests at the door of those who offer to lead our communities. A key driver of health inequalities has, undoubtedly, been 12 years of Tory austerity, but the lack of a Scottish Government strategy for tackling health inequalities is simply unforgivable.

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

**Martin Whitfield:** The Scottish poverty and inequality research unit, which is based at the University of Glasgow, published a report that states that, although we talk about these issues a lot, we do not build solutions to address them.

The debate has been fascinating, Presiding Officer, and I thank you for your indulgence.

16:40

**Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con):** Although I was not a member of the Health, Social Care and Sport committee at the conclusion of this inquiry, I am

pleased to have the chance to speak in the debate today. I thank the convener, members of the committee and all invited witnesses who came to our meetings.

We have heard extensively from a range of other committee conveners today, who outlined the complex nature of issues and solutions that are needed to tackle health inequalities. According to Public Health Scotland, Scots die younger than our neighbours do in any other western European country, and Scots in our poorest areas die 10 years earlier than those in our wealthier areas do.

The committee report recognises the effect of inequality on individuals, families and communities, and inequality disproportionately affects a number of communities.

The report states:

"it is internationally accepted that the fundamental causes of health inequalities lie largely outside the health system; health inequalities are a symptom rather than the cause of the problem."

Many members have said that today. The cabinet secretary highlighted some of the scientific legacy issues that we face, which contribute to premature illness and death among our many diverse communities.

Unfortunately, the SNP Government is failing to tackle health inequalities. In 2018 to 2020, males in the most deprived areas were, on average, expected to live 23.7 fewer years in good health than those in the least deprived areas; in 2020-21, the drug-related hospital admissions rate in Scotland's most deprived areas was more than 21 times greater than the rate in the least deprived areas. Cancer incidence is 33 per cent higher in more deprived populations in Scotland; cancer mortality rates are a staggering 74 per cent higher in the most deprived populations than they are in the least deprived ones.

I could continue, but we have heard contributions about those worrying statistics across the chamber this afternoon. Make no mistake: the Scottish Government has the levers at its disposal to tackle those health inequalities but, instead, it blames the UK Government or, as Rhoda Grant put it, passes the buck.

When the UK Government addresses some of the points that have been made in the report, that is not often acknowledged. Let us recall some of the most recent UK Government announcements from November. The Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that the national living wage would increase to £10.42 for over-23s, which will benefit more than 2 million of the lowest-paid workers across the country; disability and working age benefits will increase in line with inflation; across the UK, people will receive much-needed help next year—for example, a family on universal

credit will benefit by around £600; and new workforce legislation will allow people to access flexible working, which will go a long way to tackle economic inequalities.

Decisions that the SNP is taking now will continue to directly impact the level of inequality, such as its recently announced £400 million cut to health and social care and £38 million cut to mental health services will have an impact.

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** Is the member saying that we should not have given that pay increase to health staff from the £400 million?

**Sue Webber:** The Scottish Government gets the money from the UK Government to make its decisions, and it has every right to do so—*[Interruption.]* I would like to carry on, if the cabinet secretary, who is heckling from a sedentary position, does not mind.

Thanks to Audit Scotland, we learned the truth about this cash-strapped Scottish Government—an Administration so short of money that in the past year it could afford not to spend just under £2 billion of its £51.2 billion budget.

Through incompetence or choice, the SNP has wasted millions of pounds—whether on Prestwick airport, Ferguson Marine, BiFab or the Lochaber smelter—and the budget for the constitution remains untouched. Those are its choices and its priorities.

As an ex-smoker—I am changing the tone here—I have always believed passionately in the need to tackle smoking. I applaud many of the universal measures that are in place to help people to stop smoking, but we need to be far more targeted in our interventions. We should remember that, in Scotland's most deprived communities, one in three people smoke, compared to one in 10 in the least deprived communities. Reaching into and working specifically with marginalised communities can be done. We have shown that to be the case with our targeted community outreach vaccine programmes, so let us learn from that and do more of it.

As the report clearly states, and as we heard from Sandesh Gulhane and Fiona Hyslop, safe, secure and affordable housing is critical to tackling inequalities. Mr Whittle presented a compelling case for investment in more warm and dry homes to tackle costs that ultimately sit with the NHS in dealing with respiratory illnesses. He also referred to the critical role that nutrition and sporting activity play in the prevention agenda.

Craig Hoy accepted that the blame for the failure to combat poverty in Scotland rests with all political parties over decades. However, we

cannot escape the simple fact that the SNP has been in government here at Holyrood for the past 15 years and more, and that this is happening on its watch. The blame cannot be laid at the door of anyone other than the SNP. Its lack of a credible strategy does nothing to address the widening health inequalities that our society is facing. As the convener of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee stated in her opening remarks, it is time for “collective and systemic action”. Inaction is not an option.

16:46

**The Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport (Maree Todd):** I thank members for contributing to what has been a lively debate on an issue that I know we all care deeply about.

I have stressed in previous debates and meetings that this Parliament needs to be a public health Parliament where all parties come together to work jointly to tackle the key challenges to population health and wellbeing. I view the committee's inquiry and the debate as important steps in that process. Only by combining and strengthening our efforts will we be able to reverse the worrying trends in life expectancy and reduce health inequalities.

**Craig Hoy:** I thank the minister for reaching out and saying that we should all, across the Parliament, focus on policies. Does she therefore share my regret and, no doubt, the regret of the people who are watching at home, that a succession of her party's back-bench members decided to talk about process rather than policy? Does she see that that constitutional smokescreen is wearing thin in respect of hiding the SNP's failures?

**Maree Todd:** No, I do not. I have found Craig Hoy's tone during the debate to be frankly astonishing—it is austerity denying. We have had evidence from academics—most recently in Scotland, but also from across the UK—that has absolutely laid bare the fact that the political choices that were made by the coalition Government of the Conservatives and the Lib Dems in 2010 had the most devastating impact on our population. Those choices not only had a devastating impact immediately on our most vulnerable citizens—I witnessed that when I was working as a mental health pharmacist among people with severe and enduring mental illness—but are still having an impact. They were life-shortening policies that were brought to us by the Tories and the Lib Dems, but there has been complete denial from the Tories in the chamber today.

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

**Maree Todd:** We all acknowledge the impact of the pandemic, which has shone a light on pre-existing inequalities and exacerbated them. I now believe that the scales have fallen from Scotland's eyes. We will not tolerate this injustice any longer. Poverty is the driver of health inequalities. Like other inequalities, health inequalities are about inequality in power, wealth and status.

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

**Maree Todd:** Yes! I will take an intervention.

**Finlay Carson:** Perhaps the minister will comment on the inequalities in rural health that have been overseen by the SNP over the years. We have had closure of our cottage hospitals and downgrading of our maternity units, which has resulted in people giving birth at the side of the road. That is the SNP's problem and responsibility.

**Maree Todd:** Perhaps one of the Conservative members would like to explain why they supported the UK Government's mini-budget, which wiped £64 billion from our economy in one day.

If the Conservatives are asking me whether I think that we in the Scottish Government in an independent Scotland could have spent that money better, the answer is yes—absolutely. *[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, members.

**Maree Todd:** I will tell members what we in the Scottish Government are doing to tackle child poverty. Fiona Hyslop eloquently set out the appalling lifelong impact that poverty has on our children. In this financial year alone, we have allocated almost £3 billion, through a range of measures, that will help to mitigate the impact of the cost of living crisis on households.

**Sandesh Gulhane rose—**

**Maree Todd:** That includes support with energy bills, childcare, health and travel, as well as social security payments that are either not available elsewhere in the UK or are more generous than those elsewhere in the UK. They include the Scottish child payment and the related bridging payment.

**Brian Whittle rose—**

**Maree Todd:** The Scottish child payment has been extended to include eligible six to 15-year-olds and has been increased to £25 per child per week. About 400,000 children are potentially eligible for it.

All the Conservative speakers have said that they want to hear what the Scottish Government is

doing to tackle poverty. I am setting out what we are doing to tackle poverty. In addition, we are supporting families in a variety of other ways, including massive expansion of provision of fully funded high-quality early learning and childcare; provision of free bus travel for under-22s; provision of free school meals to about 545,000 pupils; and provision of child winter heating assistance.

**Sue Webber rose—**

**Brian Whittle rose—**

**Maree Todd:** Let us listen to what the Child Poverty Action Group report notes. It says that Scottish policies are making a major contribution to helping families to cover the cost of bringing up children, yet many of the factors that are causing families to risk deep poverty in the coming months and years are well beyond the Scottish Government's control.

**Sue Webber rose—**

**Maree Todd:** We will continue to urge the UK Government to use all the powers that it has at its disposal to tackle the cost of living crisis on the scale that is required, including access to borrowing, provision of benefits and—

**Sue Webber:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Maree Todd:** No. I will not take another intervention from the Conservatives. They are simply austerity deniers; they are refusing to listen to what the Scottish Government is doing to tackle poverty.

**Clare Adamson:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Maree Todd:** Certainly.

**Clare Adamson:** Does the minister agree with the United Nations poverty expert Philip Alston, who compared the Conservative Party's welfare policies to the creation of 19th century workhouses, and warned that unless austerity is ended the UK's poorest people face lives that are

"solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short"?

**Maree Todd:** Absolutely. I could not agree more.

On a number of occasions, we have seen that, when the UK Government has had an opportunity to tackle poverty by increasing wealth, welfare and the pay that working parents earn, it has instead punished poor people more.

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

**Maree Todd:** Yes, certainly.

**Carol Mochan:** The minister knows that there is much on which we agree on this issue. However, given the extent to which people are living in poverty, which she has just noted and which other members, including Natalie Don, mentioned, will the Government agree to do everything that it can do to ensure that people do not continue to live like that? Will the Government take into account—I hope to see this in the budget tomorrow—some of the levers that the Scottish Trades Union Congress has suggested it could use?

**The Presiding Officer:** Please conclude with this response, minister.

**Maree Todd:** Absolutely. Our budget will be set out tomorrow by John Swinney, and I know how carefully he is considering the STUC's suggestions.

I reiterate that, in everything that we are doing, both hands are tied behind our back. Every additional percentage point on a pay deal and every pound that we spend on measures to deal with rising costs must be funded from reductions elsewhere, given our largely fixed budget and our limited fiscal powers.

Scotland is, once again, at the mercy of UK Government decisions. For me and for many other members in the chamber and many people in this nation, that reinforces the urgent need for independence.

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

16:55

**Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab):** I am pleased to be closing this extremely important debate on behalf of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee. What we have heard most clearly throughout the debate is that health inequalities exist, are pernicious and continue to widen. That has to be a matter of shame for us all, and we have to recognise the scale of the challenge that lies before us.

Of course, this is not the first time that we have debated health inequalities and it will not be the last, because it is an enduring problem. The challenge that lies before us is that things are not improving. Instead, the evidence that the committee saw suggests that things are getting worse. We must all, across the chamber, resolve to do much more to tackle the issues.

From our inquiry, the committee is clear that health inequalities are a symptom of wider challenges. We have heard that echoed across the chamber by many colleagues, along with acknowledgment that we have to get to the root causes. The inequalities are the result of wider

socioeconomic inequality and systemic racism and discrimination—in particular, discrimination against women and LGBT+ people. They are also a result of how our public services are sometimes organised in a way that focuses on what is convenient for administration, rather than on providing the support that is most effective for the people in our communities. It is fair to say that, very often, they are also a result of siloed working and a lack of joined-up action across services at local and national levels.

**Brian Whittle:** Does the member agree—despite what the minister said about all the money that the Scottish Government is putting into health inequalities—that until such time as the Government accepts that Scotland is still the unhealthiest nation and has the lowest life expectancy in Europe and starts doing something about it, we will get no further forward?

**Paul O'Kane:** I was just coming on to make the point that, along with the causes that I have just outlined, we cannot get away from the fact that problems are often rooted in political choices that are made in whatever sphere of government, including here. We have to acknowledge the many deep reasons behind all the issues that we have discussed today.

The hard choices that are needed to tackle the issues are everyone's responsibility. Saying that they are everyone's responsibility can often lead to issues becoming no one's responsibility, so it is incumbent on all spheres of government to find a way to work together to change things. If we do not address the underlying causes, we will be treating symptoms, not tackling root problems. I add my voice in support of the very powerful evidence that the committee heard from Professor Michael Marmot, about how we can empower local government in particular to deal with many of the root causes on the ground.

I echo what the convener said: that our report calls for urgent action across all spheres of government—local government, the Scottish Government and the UK Government—and prioritisation of actions that are aimed at tackling the underlying causes of health inequality.

The challenge is enormous, as we have heard being reflected all across the chamber today, but it is one that we must aspire to address collectively. We have heard many important contributions today from committee colleagues and colleagues representing areas that are affected by health inequalities. We heard particularly powerful contributions from Alex Cole-Hamilton, about what is happening locally in Muirhouse; from Rhoda Grant, about neighbourhoods that sit side by side in Inverness; and from Fiona Hyslop, about the actions that are being undertaken in West Lothian as we start to tackle some of the issues at

community and neighbourhood levels. We would do well to listen to those experiences and to see how we can continue to push forward the policy agenda.

Colleagues have mentioned Covid and the current cost of living crisis. We cannot escape those challenges; they continue to affect everything that we do. The cost of living crisis became acute during our work on our report.

As we seek to rebuild and renew following the pandemic, and to navigate our way through the rising cost of living and its effects, there are opportunities for us to reframe our thinking and to tackle some of those really difficult issues. If we are to meet the challenges effectively, we need to think in radical and innovative ways; I am hopeful that the committee's report sets that out and helps colleagues to begin to think about all those things.

I want to highlight, in particular, the contributions that other committee conveners made to the debate. Martin Whitfield reflected on the fact that it has been good to have so many committees contributing to the debate and to the wider work of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee.

From Clare Adamson, who spoke on behalf of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee, we heard about the wider societal benefits of culture in tackling health inequalities and about the importance of mainstreaming preventative spend. I thank her for highlighting the four pillars of the Christie commission report, which are still highly relevant today, 12 years on from the report. We must ask ourselves some serious questions about how far we have come on Christie's vision and how far we still have to go to achieve it.

In speaking on behalf of the COVID-19 Recovery Committee, Siobhian Brown laid out shocking statistics on the excess deaths that were recorded in the most deprived areas during the pandemic. I recognise that as someone who, in part, represents Inverclyde, which had very high levels of death during the pandemic. She spoke about the on-going work on vaccination and the determination to make tackling health inequalities a priority to be addressed as part of Scotland's wider recovery. I think that that chimes with many of the recommendations in the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee's report.

Natalie Don, on behalf of the Social Justice and Social Security Committee, set out that committee's recent work on low income and debt, its scrutiny of policies to tackle child poverty, housing issues and homelessness, and its work on social security policy, all of which bear on health inequalities. We agree that there must be a joined-up preventative approach that enables people to thrive rather than just to survive.

When Audrey Nicoll spoke on behalf of the Criminal Justice Committee, she highlighted the link between crime, victimisation and inequality, and she mentioned the growing number of people who are having to turn to crime to survive. It was stark to hear about that. We must acknowledge that that is a current and persistent problem.

I could mention a number of other colleagues, although I am conscious of the time. I thought that what Brian Whittle said in his speech on behalf of the cross-party group on health inequalities was very helpful, as was what Gillian Mackay said about the work of the cross-party group on stroke. I know from what the cabinet secretary has said in the chamber and in response to the committee that there will be more discussions and debates about how we will move forward.

I again thank everyone who contributed to the report. I thank the clerks and everyone involved with the committee for their work. It is my hope—which I know is shared by many members—that by addressing the challenges that have been identified we can start to tackle health inequalities and, in doing so, improve the lives of people in Scotland.



## Urgent Question

17:02

### For Women Scotland (Judicial Review)

**Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to Lady Haldane's opinion on the petition of For Women Scotland Ltd for judicial review.

**The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government (Shona Robison):** We are pleased to note the outcome of that challenge, which is that the Scottish Government's statutory guidance on the Gender Representation on Public Boards (Scotland) Act 2018 has been held to be lawful and the petition has been dismissed. However, as I am sure Rachael Hamilton will appreciate, these are live proceedings with the possibility of an appeal.

**Rachael Hamilton:** Throughout this debate, women's organisations have repeatedly warned that the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill could put at risk the protections that are set out in the Equality Act 2010, including those relating to single-sex spaces. Despite that, Scottish National Party ministers have said, over and over again, that those protections will not be affected.

Now, we have a court ruling that says that, from the perspective of the 2010 act, trans women are included in the legal definition of women. By next week, the Scottish Parliament could pass a self-identification law that could significantly speed up the process of obtaining a gender recognition certificate. That would make it substantially easier for violent men to abuse the process and target women in shelters for abused women and other protected places.

Does the cabinet secretary now accept that the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill may impact the rights and protections for women and girls that exist under the Equality Act 2010? Does she agree that we must now pause the bill to consider the full implications of the court ruling?

**Shona Robison:** The judicial review was not considering the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill. The bill changes the process and requirements for obtaining a gender recognition certificate; it does not amend the legal effects of obtaining one, which are set out principally in section 9 of the Gender Recognition Act 2004. The effect of a GRC remains what it has been for the past 18 years: it enables people to change their birth certificate to be in line with their acquired gender. The bill makes no change to that effect. It also clearly does not modify the Equality Act 2010, which is now stated in the bill.

Lady Haldane's ruling applies to GRCs as they are issued under the current United Kingdom-wide process and will apply equally to those issued in Scotland under the process that is set out in the bill, should Parliament agree to it. Even if the bill did not exist, the ruling would have been the same.

It is entirely in line and consistent with the position of the Equality and Human Rights Commission that the effect of a GRC is as I have laid out. I know that Rachael Hamilton sets a lot of store by what the Equality and Human Rights Commission says on such matters.

Exceptions in the Equality Act 2010 enable single-sex services to exclude trans people, or treat them less favourably, where that is a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim. Those exceptions still apply and can do so whether or not the person has a GRC. We support those exceptions and think that they provide important protections. The bill does not change them.

**Rachael Hamilton:** The SNP cannot close its ears to the dangers that the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill presents. In just one week's time, the Scottish Parliament could sleepwalk into passing a bill that would put women and girls at risk.

The bill is one of the most controversial pieces of legislation ever brought before the Parliament. It deserves to be fully scrutinised, not rushed through. Will the cabinet secretary tell me and the thousands of women across Scotland who are worried about the implications of the bill for them and their daughters why it is essential that it be passed before Christmas?

**Shona Robison:** I say to Rachael Hamilton, who I know was not in the Parliament over the course of the consideration of the issues, that we have been considering the issues for six years now. I consider that to be quite a long time to have considered some of the principles behind the bill. There have been two full consultations on it and a lot of discussion and debate in the Parliament. The Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee had, I think, 12 sessions looking at it.

At the end of the day, the Parliament has to come to a conclusion on the bill. However, on people being worried about it, that is why I set out in my original answer to Rachael Hamilton what the bill does and, importantly, what it does not do. It does not change any of the purpose and effect of a gender recognition certificate, which has been in place for nearly 20 years now. It does not change the protections and exceptions under the Equality Act 2010. Those remain the same.

Those are the reassurances that I would hope members of the Parliament would be able to

communicate to anyone who asked them about the effect of the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill.

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** The cabinet secretary will be aware that there are amendments for consideration next week that restate the provisions in the Equality Act 2010, including exclusions that can be applied in the delivery of single-sex spaces where it is proportionate to do so, and that require the Government to publish guidance on the impact of the operation of the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill for public bodies and service providers in Scotland. Will the Government consider the position very carefully and ensure that services are not left to interpret the legislation by themselves?

**Shona Robison:** Obviously, we will give, have given and are giving consideration to all the amendments that have been lodged. However, as Jackie Baillie is more than aware, for those reasons, at stage 2, we agreed to an amendment from one of her party's members, Pam Duncan-Glancy, that, for the avoidance of doubt, we would have it on the face of the bill that nothing in the Equality Act 2010 changes. That is important.

I ask Jackie Baillie to reflect on the competence issues of our going beyond that. To select some parts of an act and not others is confusing in itself, but there is also the question of competence and challenge. I ask Jackie Baillie to reflect on some of the utterances that are coming from the United Kingdom Government about a willingness and a keenness to challenge the bill. I do not want to allow that to happen by including things in the bill that would make that easier. I ask the member to reflect on other occasions when that has been the case. Although I am sympathetic to what Jackie Baillie is trying to achieve, I ask her to reflect on that point.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** The safety of women in our society is of paramount importance to my party, which is why we established a men's violence commission only last month. The conflation of the issue of women's safety and the provisions of the bill is sad, worrying and, at times, unhelpful. We have to uphold the concerns that people have, but we can, as a Parliament, express to them that the provisions in the bill that will make it easier to have the identity and gender of trans people in our communities recognised on the documents that we, as a state, require them to hold is of paramount importance because the GRA, unamended, is harming people every day.

In relation to the message around the debate and the consideration of stage 3 proceedings next week, does the cabinet secretary agree that we need to get into that issue? We need to point out things such as the fact that there are no single-sex

spaces in our society that require the presentation of a GRC or a birth certificate—in fact, they are not valid forms of identification. Making it easier for people to have who they are recognised on the documents that they are required to hold will not put more women in harm's way.

**Shona Robison:** I agree with that. I cannot express and highlight enough the fact that those exceptions in the Equality Act 2010 are there for the occasions when it is important, for all the reasons that we understand, to exclude trans women—or trans men, for that matter—from the discrete services that are clearly laid out in the guidance on the 2010 act. The gender recognition bill changes none of that at all.

Finally, if we look at the evidence from other countries, we see that something like 250 million people live in countries that have a process of statutory declaration around gender recognition, and no evidence is emerging from those countries that there is systematic misuse or abuse of those systems. That is important reassurance. However, it is important that we try to discuss the bill in an atmosphere and a tone that addresses concerns but does not lead to a wider culture war, which we unfortunately see in some parts of social media, because that does not do anyone any good. We all have a leadership role in trying to avoid that.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes the urgent question.

## Business Motions

17:13

### The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-07242, 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 20 December 2022

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

*followed by* Stage 3 Proceedings: Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill

*followed by* Committee Announcements

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

8.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 21 December 2022

1.15 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Members' Business

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

*followed by* Stage 3 Debate: Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.15 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 22 December 2022

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

12.45 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 10 January 2023

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 11 January 2023

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 12 January 2023

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* Scottish Government Business

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 19 December 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]

**The Presiding Officer:** I call Alexander Burnett to speak to and move amendment S6M-07242.1.

**Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con):** As I indicated last week, the Scottish Conservatives seek to amend next week's business programme to bring forward statements and debates that should have been scheduled before Christmas. I also hope that the Minister for Parliamentary Business corrects the *Official Report* of last week to accurately reflect the fact that the Parliamentary Bureau was not unanimous in its support of the timetabling of the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill.

I thank the minister for agreeing to a statement on the Climate Change Committee report next Wednesday, but a week's worth of business is being delayed for no good reason. Our alternative programme includes a statement on the strategic

transport projects review 2 report, which was snuck out late last Thursday, and the update on national planning framework 4 that we were promised. It also provides for an update on the Scottish Government's biodiversity strategy, which I am sure all parties agree is important.

On top of that, my colleague Stephen Kerr has tried to raise the curriculum for excellence achievement statistics in Parliament to no avail. There is no reason why an education statement should not be scheduled next week so that the cabinet secretary can answer questions from elected representatives.

We also seek to timetable two debates. One is on the Scottish budget, a subject that the Scottish Government had previously allocated only one minute of questions per £1 billion of spending—*[Interruption.]*—and the other is on the next steps for the agriculture bill, which NFU Scotland has been pushing for.

Those issues have been kicked into the new year by the Scottish Government in its unrelenting quest to pass the gender bill before Christmas. The bill has been accused of lacking the Parliament's usual scrutiny process—*[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** Can we please extend courtesy to Mr Burnett and ensure that we can hear members when they are speaking?

**Alexander Burnett:** Indeed, since the Scottish National Party and the Greens joined forces, racing through legislation without scrutiny has become the norm. Its reasoning for rushing the bill is completely unacceptable—and we all know what it is—and it is even more unreasonable when all the other issues that I have mentioned are considered, as they are now being sidelined.

It is interesting to note how much importance has been placed on finishing the gender bill before 2023 when we consider that the last week before recess is usually when the Government rolls out a list of its failures and embarrassments in the hope that the festive break will swallow them all up. Well, last week the minister tried to score a cheap point by suggesting that we would close down Parliament early for Christmas, so today I ask him to put his money where his mouth is and support my amendment so that Parliament has a proper programme of work next Thursday instead of the half day that he and his party's MSPs hope for.

I urge all members to support my amendment.

I move amendment S6M-07242.1, to leave out from

*"followed by* Stage 3 Proceedings: Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill"

to

"12.45 pm Decision Time"  
and insert  
*"followed by* Ministerial Statement: Climate Change Report  
*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: Scottish Budget 2023-24  
*followed by* Committee Announcements  
*followed by* Business Motions  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
5.00 pm Decision Time  
*followed by* Members' Business  
Wednesday 21 December 2022  
2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Rural Affairs and Islands; Health and Social Care  
*followed by* Ministerial Statement: National Planning Framework 4 Update  
*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: Agriculture Bill: Next Steps  
*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 22 December 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* Ministerial Statement: Curriculum for Excellence Achievement Statistics  
*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Biodiversity Strategy  
*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR) 2 Report  
4.25 pm Decision Time".  
17:17

**The Minister for Parliamentary Business (George Adam):** Well, that was a thing, wasn't it?

We covered all of this last week and again at the Parliamentary Bureau this week. Yesterday, the bureau agreed this business programme. As I said, we have already added a week to the timeline and have doubled the length of time for

the stage 3 debate. Both of those changes were requested by the Labour business manager and, as always, I am happy to work with colleagues.

**Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** As the minister is aware, stage 3 of the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill was delayed and extended over two days following our request for more time and detailed scrutiny. The stage 3 debate was also doubled in length following our request. I welcome those changes.

However, the minister will also be aware of our request for statements on key issues, as Alexander Burnett highlighted. Most notably, Scottish Labour was first to request statements on the Climate Change Committee's report and on educational attainment. Can I therefore ask the minister to reflect on whether time, which does not take away from the time that is needed for detailed and proper scrutiny of the gender reform bill, can be set aside for additional statements next week?

**George Adam:** As always, Mr Bibby is reasonable in his requests, and I am quite willing to come to the points that he made. The timeline that we have set for the gender recognition bill is set out in the Parliament's standing orders and in the convention that has been agreed by the Government and the Parliament.

In addition—and this will help Mr Bibby out—I am pleased to say that we are accepting all the requests for statements from business managers, and those include every single one in the Conservative amendment that is before us. I will get back to the bureau with dates for them as soon as possible.

Finally, in response to the Conservatives' attempt to add a debate on the budget, I have one thing to say: the Scottish Government would relish such a debate. I think that the Deputy First Minister would also relish such a debate, because it would allow us to outline just how disastrous the Tory budget is for Scotland. However, I am likely to come back to that at a later date, so I propose the business as agreed yesterday by the bureau.

**The Presiding Officer:** The question is, that amendment S6M-07242.1, in the name of Alexander Burnett, which seeks to amend motion S6M-07242, in the name of George Adam, setting out a business programme, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division. There will be a brief pause to allow members to access the digital voting system.

17:19

*Meeting suspended.*

17:23

*On resuming—*

**The Presiding Officer:** The question is, that amendment S6M-07242.1, in the name of Alexander Burnett, be agreed to. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

**Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Neither my phone nor my laptop would let me log into the system. I would have voted no.

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

**The Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport (Michael Matheson):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app is not working. I would have voted no.

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

**For**

Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (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)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

**Against**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)

Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Ewing, 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)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

#### Abstentions

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)

Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S6M-07242.1, in the name of Alexander Burnett, is: For 30, Against 68, Abstentions 21.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S6M-07242, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

The vote is closed.

**Michael Matheson:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app is not working. I would have voted yes.

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

**Michelle Thomson:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I am afraid that I still cannot get into the system. I would have voted yes.

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

#### For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)

Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine)  
 (SNP)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

## Against

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

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on motion S6M-07242, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme, is: For 89, Against 29, Abstentions 0.

### *Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 20 December 2022

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

*followed by* Stage 3 Proceedings: Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill

*followed by* Committee Announcements

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

8.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 21 December 2022

1.15 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Members' Business

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

*followed by* Stage 3 Debate: Gender Recognition

	Reform (Scotland) Bill
<i>followed by</i>	Business Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Approval of SSIs (if required)
5.15 pm	Decision Time
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business
Thursday 22 December 2022	
11.40 am	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
11.40 am	General Questions
12.00 pm	First Minister's Questions
12.45 pm	Decision Time
Tuesday 10 January 2023	
2.00 pm	Time for Reflection
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Topical Questions (if selected)
<i>followed by</i>	Scottish Government Business
<i>followed by</i>	Committee Announcements
<i>followed by</i>	Business Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm	Decision Time
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business
Wednesday 11 January 2023	
2.00 pm	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
2.00 pm	Portfolio Questions: Constitution, External Affairs and Culture; Justice and Veterans
<i>followed by</i>	Scottish Government Business
<i>followed by</i>	Business Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Approval of SSIs (if required)
5.00 pm	Decision Time
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business
Thursday 12 January 2023	
11.40 am	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
11.40 am	General Questions
12.00 pm	First Minister's Questions
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business
2.30 pm	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
2.30 pm	Portfolio Questions: Education and Skills
<i>followed by</i>	Scottish Government Business
<i>followed by</i>	Business Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm	Decision Time
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 19 December 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.

**The Presiding Officer:** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-07243, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on a stage 1 timetable.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Patient Safety Commissioner for Scotland Bill at stage 1 be completed by 12 May 2023.—[George Adam]

*Motion agreed to.*



## Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:28

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** 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-07244 and S6M-07245, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments.

*Motions moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Budget (Scotland) Act 2022 Amendment Regulations 2023 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Public Water Supplies (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2022 [draft] be approved.—[George Adam]

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

## Decision Time

17:29

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** There are two questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that motion S6M-07198, in the name of Gillian Martin, on behalf of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee, on tackling health inequalities in Scotland, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament notes the conclusions and recommendations contained in the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee's 11th Report, 2022 (Session 6), *Tackling health inequalities in Scotland* (SP Paper 230).

**The Presiding Officer:** I propose to ask a single question on two Parliamentary Bureau motions. As no member has objected, the question is, that motions S6M-07244 and S6M-07245, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments, be agreed to.

*Motions agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Budget (Scotland) Act 2022 Amendment Regulations 2023 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Public Water Supplies (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2022 [draft] be approved.

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

## Transforming Scotland's Vacant and Derelict Sites

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** The final item of business today is a members' business debate on motion S6M-06302, in the name of Emma Harper, on transforming Scotland's vacant and derelict sites. The debate will be concluded without any question being put. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons now.

### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament notes with concern reports that Scotland has almost 9,500 hectares of vacant and derelict urban land, and that just over one quarter of Scotland's 5.4 million population is estimated to live within 500 metres of a derelict site, with this percentage increasing in communities on the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD); believes that Scotland's stock of vacant and derelict land is a legacy of the nation's industrial past, with many of these sites, including across the South Scotland Region, such as the George Hotel in Stranraer, former Interfloor Factory in Dumfries, Central Hotel in Annan and N Peal Building in Hawick, being in their derelict condition for many years; notes research, including from the Scottish Land Commission, University of Glasgow and Green Space Scotland, which shows that vacant and derelict sites can harm the wellbeing of communities, with findings reportedly showing that these sites can contribute to poor mental health, feelings of a lack of safety, anxiety and a persistent low mood; further notes reported concerns from communities around the traceability of the ownership of vacant and derelict sites, which, it understands, are often owned by absentee landlords and corporations as part of property and financial portfolios; considers that Scotland has a huge potential to lead the UK in transforming these sites into useful community assets; notes the view that focussing on these sites as a vehicle for delivery could help to enhance policy coordination across civic Scotland by concentrating effort and resources where they are most needed to benefit communities; welcomes the Scottish Land Commissions report, *Transforming Scotland's Approach to Vacant and Derelict Land, Recommendations from the Vacant and Derelict Land Taskforce*; notes calls on the Scottish Government to set out its progress towards implementing these recommendations, and to outline its engagement with the Scottish Land Commission's joint Vacant and Derelict Land Taskforce; further notes what it sees as the role of communities, as, it understands, has been seen in Heathhall, Dumfries and Galloway, in calling on Dumfries and Galloway Council to address the former Interfloor Factory, and notes the view that communities across Scotland should become involved in taking transformative action to ensure these sites dealt with as a priority.

17:31

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** I am pleased to open this members' business debate, and I thank the members who have signed my motion, which allows us to debate Scotland's vacant and derelict sites. I thought that the motion would attract support from all parties because it is relevant to most communities in Scotland, as one third of the population lives within 500m of a

derelict site. Therefore, I am a wee bit hingin-luggit that no Conservatives supported it. However, I see that there are three Conservative members in the chamber, so if they give speeches, perhaps they could explain why they did not sign the motion.

I want to thank the Scottish Land Commission for all that it does to facilitate change in the situation with regard to Scotland's vacant, abandoned and derelict sites, and to bring about practical solutions for the public sector. A paper by the Scottish Land Commission provides real examples of areas where work has been done, under the headings, "Places to live", "Places to power", "Places to grow", "Places to play", "Places to connect", "Places to learn", "Places to renew", "Places to work" and "Places to imagine". In particular, I thank the Scottish Land Commission's chair, Andrew Thin, and its head of policy, Shona Glenn, for meeting me and for their continued engagement with my office.

As I said, almost one third of the Scottish population currently lives within 500m of a derelict site, which is a legacy of Scotland's industrial past. In the most deprived communities in the Scottish index of multiple deprivation, that figure increases to 55 per cent. Fixing urban dereliction could play a major role in addressing health inequalities and improving wellbeing, but the benefits do not stop there. Tackling urban dereliction could also help us to solve some of society's biggest challenges. The benefits of addressing derelict land are obvious, yet we still see heels being dragged when it comes to bringing about the change that is needed.

The Scottish Land Commission has said that, for far too long, the issue of repairing, renewing and renovating brownfield derelict sites has been dumped on the "too difficult" pile. We need to change the narrative and recognise the massive opportunity that presents itself to us.

Understanding and assessing the impacts of blight on people who live near derelict land provides a powerful evidence base to help communities and decision makers to act. In addition to the obvious impacts of derelict sites, including the visual disturbance and embarrassment that is experienced by people who live next to them, there is also substantial evidence about the negative health implications of dereliction.

In 2016, the findings from joint research by the Scottish Land Commission, the Glasgow Centre for Population Health, the University of Glasgow and other partners were brought together in a report that, for the first time, identified the major causes of Scotland's excess mortality. It is interesting that the point that I am coming to follows the debate on health inequalities that we had earlier this afternoon.

One of the factors that was identified was an adverse physical environment that is caused by living in and around dereliction. The study found that living close to or next to such areas leads to poor mental health, feelings of being unsafe, anxiety and persistent low mood.

Across Dumfries and Galloway and the Scottish Borders, we have many derelict sites—the George hotel in Stranraer, the former rubber and Interfloor factory in Dumfries, the Central hotel in Annan, the Mercury hotel in Moffat, and the N Peal and Glenmac buildings in Hawick.

In my engagement to try to get action, I have had responses from site owners and local authorities. However, The local authorities' response is that they do not have the powers to deal with derelict sites. I checked that, and the Scottish Parliament information centre has confirmed that local authorities have available to them several options for action on derelict sites.

**Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** The council in Dumfries and Galloway has been run by the Scottish National Party and Labour for more than a few years, now. Why are you letting down the people of Stranraer who have had to live next to the George hotel for all these years?

**Emma Harper:** Ah dinnae think that Ah am lettin anybody doon, actually. I am coming to the issues that we want to address. I think that it is very clear that there are actions that could be taken.

In the SPICe briefing that I received, options were available. There are various funding sources. The Scottish Land Commission even has its “handy table” of funding sources on its website, including for public sector bodies. In summary, local authorities can issue to a property owner, lessee or occupier a wasteland notice that requires them to take specific actions to improve the condition of their building or land. If that responsible person refuses, the local authority can carry out the work itself and claim back the cost from the owner under the Town and Country (Planning) (Scotland) Act 1997.

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

**Emma Harper:** I will be happy to give way, as there is a lot of interest in the subject, if there is time, because I have a lot to cover.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I can give you the time back, Ms Harper.

**Stephen Kerr:** My intervention is very brief. My colleague asked a question in relation to an example that is cited in the motion. Given what Emma Harper has just said, why has the council

that is controlled by your party not done that in the case that was mentioned by my friend?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Please speak through the chair.

**Emma Harper:** Thanks for that intervention. Ah am no a cooncillor—so I am laying out what I see from the research that I have done for the past year, so that we can help to inform and educate, and to have people understand that there are actions that can be taken. I would like to proceed. Thank you.

The local authorities can do things such as issue a wasteland notice to the property owner—I have said that. If the responsible person refuses, the local authority can carry out the work itself, through the Town and Country (Planning) (Scotland) Act 1997. Also, under the Building (Scotland) Act 2003, councils can issue a dangerous buildings notice. The local authority or community can, under the Land Reform Act 2003, make a compulsory purchase of a building or land, to take action on it.

With regard to owners, I have written to the owners of many derelict sites, and I have had a single response, which is kind of disappointing. The Land Commission has recommended that we improve how we identify owners of vacant and derelict sites, such as through a public register, which I would support.

I also support the introduction of compulsory sale orders, as has been recommended by the Scottish Land Commission. I would welcome an update from the Government on progress towards bringing forward legislation to enable CSOs.

I therefore ask the minister how we can better enable local authorities—for example, through national planning framework 4—to use current legislation to transform our vacant, abandoned and derelict sites. I also ask the minister how communication with the owners of derelict sites can be improved.

One of the other common misconceptions that I would like to highlight in dealing with derelict buildings is historic-building listing. People perceive that no action can be taken on some derelict buildings due to their listed status at grade B or C for historical or cultural reasons. That is my experience with the former factory in Dumfries, which is a grade B listed site of historical architectural significance.

However, local authorities have the ability to seek removal of, or change to, a site's current listed status. In effect, they can de-list a property. That process is governed by Historic Environment Scotland, and it is an option that can take only eight weeks if there is a strong case to back up the change to the listed building's status. Local

authorities, developers and communities must become more aware of that option so that action is taken on derelict sites.

The issue of derelict sites and buildings is complex, and I would need more time to explain, and give specific examples of, the work that I have done over the past year, including work on contaminated land with assistance from the Scottish Environment Protection Agency. I have also been working with Heathhall community council in Dumfries with petition Dumfries and Galloway Council to act on the total eyesore that is the Interfloor factory site—and that is just the start.

The issue of transforming Scotland's vacant, abandoned and derelict land is central to health and wellbeing and to community empowerment, and it is vital that we pay attention to it. I look forward to hearing colleagues' contributions.

17:40

**Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** I thank Emma Harper for bringing the debate to the chamber. There is nothing more depressing than walking or driving past empty properties that in many of our towns and communities have simply been left neglected and allowed to crumble away over months and years.

The problem of tackling abandoned buildings and derelict land is not restricted to one region; I recognise that the same thing is happening across the whole of Scotland. However, as we have heard, a prime example is the George hotel in Stranraer. A once proud-looking building in the heart of a thriving town, the hotel was a popular meeting point for locals and visitors alike, but when business fell away and it was closed—

**Emma Harper:** Would the member possibly take a wee intervention?

**Finlay Carson:** No, thank you. Let me get into my speech.

The building was allowed to become an absolute eyesore, and it was left to fall apart. After years of neglect, and after much pressure, the SNP and Labour-led Dumfries and Galloway Council finally bought the building in 2017. However, the local authority has done nothing with it, despite—as we heard from Emma Harper—having a so-called strategy and the ability to act on neglected properties.

**Emma Harper:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Finlay Carson:** I am happy to give way.

**Emma Harper:** Thank you—I really appreciate the member taking an intervention.

We agree that the George hotel is a total eyesore, and it is fabulous that we are highlighting that in a debate in the chamber. Nonetheless, would Finlay Carson agree that action has finally been started to address that building and to have the community decide what it wants to do with it?

**Finlay Carson:** I would very much like to agree, but action is far too slow, and the council has failed in its responsibility to bring it forward. Dumfries and Galloway Council has a strategy that is often reviewed, but it has always failed to deliver for our communities.

An application has been submitted for money to be made available through the United Kingdom Government's levelling-up scheme to provide millions of pounds of funding for redevelopment, and it is hoped that a decision will be forthcoming to give the building a new lease of life.

Sadly, however, that is an exception, rather than the norm. Just last week, the windows of another abandoned building in Stranraer fell out, which has forced boarding up of the property. It was lucky that nobody was injured.

It is fair to say that action is needed to ensure that vacant and derelict sites are given a new lease of life quickly and—critically—with a greater pace of engagement with the local community. Although it is vital that property owners and community groups have the opportunity to consider options for reuse or temporary reuse of vacant and derelict land, the need for consultation cannot be allowed to become a way to kick action into the long grass.

What hope is there for the likes of Stranraer, with a Labour and SNP administration in charge? There was £6 million of ring-fenced money set aside when the ferries moved, but not one penny has been spent by that ineffective and dysfunctional administration. Despite Wigtownshire having overwhelmingly rejected those parties in the elections this year, the electorate has been disgusted to see that a grubby deal between the SNP and Labour has allowed them to continue in the council administration.

All that said, any strategy that looks to address the problem of empty buildings and land has to be welcomed, and Dumfries and Galloway Council has just recently refreshed its approach. Although the new strategy is not exactly groundbreaking in any shape or form, it cannot be faulted—provided that the local authority acts more quickly and responds with renewed energy and urgency, rather than sitting back and allowing buildings to fall into disrepair. On this occasion, action definitely speaks louder than words, and simply talking about what could or should be done does not get things done.

The SNP and Labour council administration has neglected the economic development and planning department, which has resulted in delays in planning and building control. Those delays are significant and present a real risk to developments getting off the ground. We know that there is a shortage of qualified planners across Scotland, with the shortage being amplified in rural local authorities, so we need to see action to get those posts filled in Dumfries and Galloway and across rural areas in order to have a viable planning system that supports redevelopment of derelict buildings and vacant land, rather than slowing or stopping their reuse. That will, I hope, allow councils to become more engaged—in particular, in identifying sites that might be suitable for greening, growing, planting or even biodiversity opportunities.

The Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee and Parliament passed new land reform measures to help communities to intervene to prevent derelict buildings from hampering economic sustainability. However, those powers are simply not being used or promoted to the extent that they could be. We must prioritise development on brownfield sites and previously used land, especially for new housing developments across all sectors, although I would like to see a lot more being done specifically to build more low-cost social housing.

In our 2021 manifesto, the Scottish Conservatives called for the introduction of

“Compulsory Sales Orders for long-term unoccupied properties”.

In many cases, unoccupied properties are dilapidated and are becoming a blight on our communities, which is why we believe that CSOs remain the best course of action. Similarly, the Scottish Conservatives proposed a relaxation of planning laws to allow redevelopment of unoccupied business premises in our town centres as affordable housing.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Could you conclude, please, Mr Carson?

**Finlay Carson:** That would not only increase footfall in town centres, but would turn them into places where people go.

In conclusion, I stress that having a strategy is totally worthless unless the commitment, resources and funding are all provided to take this growing problem seriously, before it gets totally out of hand.

**Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** I thank Emma Harper for lodging her motion on an issue that is of deep concern to all our communities. The Parliament’s Economy and Fair Work Committee has just completed its inquiry into town centres,

and the challenge of vacant and derelict buildings and land was a common thread that ran throughout the evidence that we heard from across the country. That reflects the fact that the problem is increasing: it is not simply a historical legacy of our declining industrial base; there has also been a more recent decline in our town centres.

I am pleased that the committee agreed to visit my home town of Dumfries during that inquiry, so that members could see for themselves the buildings that are mentioned in Emma Harper’s motion. Ironically, on the day of the committee’s visit, a major arterial route through the town, English Street, had just been closed off because a derelict, long-empty and long-neglected building had been deemed unsafe. That is a stark example of the fact that landlords and developers are not queuing up to invest in town centre properties.

**Emma Harper:** The Treasure Cave building on English Street, which Colin Smyth mentioned, was the only one in relation to which I received a response from the owner. From that, we were able to engage with and seek support from the local authority so that it could proceed with the demolition of the building. Getting engagement from the owner of that site was an interesting challenge, but something has now been done.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I can give you the time back for the intervention, Mr Smyth.

**Colin Smyth:** Thank you, Presiding Officer.

There were challenges with that building. First, it was incredibly challenging for the council to track down the owner. Secondly, I highlight—with all respect to the owner—that there had been years of neglect of the building from an owner who had been absent. All that we have achieved so far is to demolish the building, but there is—sadly—still no sign of the site being developed into anything else in the near future.

That highlights the point that I was making: developers and owners are not queuing up to invest in our town centres. We have seen the rise in out-of-town developments over the years, and the tide of online shopping becoming a tsunami during the Covid-19 pandemic. That really has taken a toll on the high street, which makes properties such as the one that I have cited not viable for new developments. There are too many such properties, and too many empty shops across towns like Dumfries. That example has also exposed the challenges that local councils face in taking action against the—often absent—landlords who allow the properties to fall into such a state of disrepair.

I do not think that the powers that councils have go far enough. Craig Iles, from South Ayrshire Council planning department in Emma Harper’s

region, told the Economy and Fair Work Committee during our inquiry:

“The expectation of the powers is greater than what the powers actually are.”—[*Official Report, Economy and Fair Work Committee*, 25 May 2022; c 30.]

If a council wants to undertake work on a building, it needs to show that it has a plan for that building, that the work is in the public interest and that it can afford it. Whether it is the issuing of an amenity notice, a defective building notice or a dangerous building notice, or the compulsory purchase of a property, councils currently often simply do not have the resources that would be needed to take such action.

Finlay Carson raised the issue of planning. Research by the Royal Town Planning Institute Scotland has shown that, as of June 2021, right across Scotland, budgets for planning services had been reduced by 42 per cent since 2009, and nearly a third of planning staff had been cut. It is clear that, often, there are not the staff or resources to pursue landlords, especially given that such action often ends with a council having to fund repairs on a property at a stage when it has fallen into a state of disrepair. The council then tries to claim the money back from the owners, which is incredibly challenging and can, on occasion, end up with the council owning the property.

That is a concern that I have about Emma Harper’s motion and its mention of the former Interfloor factory. In my view, there is little chance that the council will be successful in claiming back from the current owner any money that it spends on that building, certainly at the level of investment that would be needed to make a difference, and therefore the council could end up owning the factory.

Funding a future purpose for a site that will have had 110 years of industrial pollution is way beyond the resources of a local authority. The scale of the challenge involved with such sites means that we need a strategic national approach, with Government intervention through agencies such as Scottish Enterprise and South of Scotland Enterprise to invest in clearing sites to make them suitable for future use.

On occasion, that occurs at a local level. Finlay Carson mentioned the George hotel. I can tell him that the council bought that hotel within a few months of the current administration coming in, after years of the Conservatives doing absolutely nothing—that includes Mr Carson, who was a councillor at the time. The council took action by buying the George hotel, but the cost of buying that modest building and turning it into something suitable is enormous, never mind what the cost would be for a site that is the size of the former Interfloor factory in Dumfries. Councils need

support to ensure that they can actually invest in projects. Where the project involves a site on the scale of that factory, however, I think that we need major Government intervention to clear such sites and make them fit for purpose.

I conclude on a positive note. On its visit to Dumfries, the Economy and Fair Work Committee met with Midsteeple Quarter, which is a new community benefit company—I declare an interest as a local resident who is a member of that co-operative. Midsteeple Quarter is taking on the neglect of absent landlords by taking back our High Street, shop by shop, and investing in those properties to deliver the mix of uses that our town needs: not just quality retail space that is suitable and affordable for local businesses, but community space and—crucially—new housing, so that we once again have people living in our town.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You need to conclude, Mr Smyth.

To support that company and others, the Government needs to recognise that the costs of turning derelict town-centre properties into housing, for example, will always be more expensive than building on greenfield sites, and councils therefore need support to make such redevelopment happen and really start to tackle the blight of derelict properties on our high streets.

17:52

**Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP):** I congratulate my colleague and friend Emma Harper on securing this vital debate on a subject to which, I am sure, every member in the chamber, and indeed everyone across the country, can relate. Derelict sites blight our communities and have an impact on public health, and they are not representative of the modern, post-industrial Scotland that we are aa bidin in today.

The potential for reusing vacant and derelict sites, known to some as empty brownfield sites, is huge. It is difficult to think of a single major area of Scottish public policy that would not benefit from a concerted national effort to bring those sites back into use. Focusing on those sites as a vehicle for delivery could help to enhance policy co-ordination across civic Scotland by concentrating effort and resources where they are most needed, as a tangible example of the place principle in action.

Transforming Scotland’s legacy sites requires innovation and technical skills across a variety of professional disciplines, from ecologists, demolition teams and architects through to space planners, construction experts and renewable heat engineers. With the right strategic leadership, we could use this opportunity to develop the skills and

commercial expertise that Scotland needs in order to shift to a sustainable growth path and deliver a green recovery. By focusing on vacant and derelict land, we can do that in a way that will help direct resources and support to the parts of the country that need it most, thereby ensuring that those who were left behind by the last chapter in Scotland's economic history are at the forefront of the next.

As a member of the Parliament's Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, I am, of course, interested in climate action. As we know, climate action needs to be a collective endeavour, but barely half of those who are living in our most deprived communities—which are the communities with the highest concentrations of vacant and derelict land—see it as an urgent priority. If we really want to make climate action a collective priority, tackling our legacy of vacant and derelict sites is key in getting the climate message through to everyone.

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

**Jackie Dunbar:** Yes, of course. Can I get my time back, Presiding Officer?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You can get the time back, Miss Dunbar.

**Finlay Carson:** Will you set out where the Scottish Government has got it wrong in the past 15 years? You are only now suggesting that the Government should do something, although legislation was passed during the previous session of Parliament

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Please make remarks through the chair.

**Jackie Dunbar:** I have not been here for 15 years. I am a former councillor and have been trying to get derelict sites sorted. I am sure that the minister will be able to speak about the time that he has spent here in Parliament.

When we pause to think about it, we know that many of Scotland's derelict sites are part of our industrial past.

**The Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth (Tom Arthur):** Does the member agree that the challenges that we face with vacant and derelict land were caused by the de-industrialisation that was inflicted upon Scotland in the 1980s-

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Please make your comments into the microphone, minister.

**Tom Arthur:** —by a Government that we did not elect?

**Jackie Dunbar:** I thank—

**Finlay Carson:** That is just clutching at straws.

**Jackie Dunbar:** Should I sit down again, Presiding Officer?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Please speak, Ms Dunbar.

**Jackie Dunbar:** Thank you, Presiding Officer. I thank the minister for his intervention. I agree that a lot needs to be done and that there is a lot that we could do about what has been foisted on us since the 1980s, but this is not a debate on independence.

Like many across the chamber, I have a constituency—Aberdeen Donside—that has fallen victim to derelict sites. I have been trying to see action on one of those for many years, including during my time as ward councillor. The Logie shops on Manor Drive, near the Haudagain roundabout and just off the newly named Brian Adam Road, have lain empty for well over 20 years. Quite frankly, the site is an eyesore. I have raised the site's derelict condition with Aberdeen City Council and am pleased that it has agreed to carry out a safety assessment, of which I await the outcome. Before anyone stands up to intervene, I say to members that I contacted Aberdeen City Council both when and after the city had an SNP administration—I take no prisoners with regard to who is in administration. I will be urging the local authority to use the powers outlined by Emma Harper MSP, so that decisive action can be taken on that building once and for all.

The public sector—including Aberdeen City Council—can lead the way in identifying the potential for sites to be transformed into assets that provide real benefit to local communities. It would be great to see a community orchard in that place, which is small but could have huge benefit. Those transformations could include much-needed green space for health and wellbeing, growing spaces, community facilities and housing and business use. I therefore ask the minister for a commitment that the Scottish Government will work with local authorities, as it already does, as much as possible and will provide as much support as it can to see derelict sites addressed in communities across the country.

I again congratulate my colleague Emma Harper on bringing forward this debate. Addressing derelict sites—including across Aberdeen Donside—brings numerous benefits and we must see national action to bring about meaningful change.

17:58

**Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green):** I welcome the opportunity to debate an issue that is a particular challenge in rural areas where a vacant or derelict site can be a long-term eyesore in the heart of the community. I thank my

colleague Emma Harper for securing the debate. As her motion rightly notes, in many cases those sites reflect decades of decline in our communities and symbolise the loss of industry and essential infrastructure.

Across the region that I represent, the Highlands and Islands, there are 188 registered vacant and derelict sites. They include disused railways, in a region that is crying out for improved public transport; abandoned auction marts and agricultural buildings, at a time when land prices make it challenging for new entrants to the agricultural industry; and even family homes, at a time when home ownership is increasingly unaffordable.

By failing to enable the redevelopment of these sites—and many of them are developable—we are not only wasting the embodied energy in these buildings but squandering an opportunity to improve our communities.

If they were brought back into use by communities, these sites would offer tremendous potential to respond to their changing needs. For example, the community in Gairloch, supported by the Communities Housing Trust, has transformed a derelict site in the centre of the village into 25 homes with a range of tenures, and a community hub that is Scotland's first public passive house building. The award-winning mixed development represents a great model of what is possible for communities across Scotland with the right support and funding and a partnership approach.

In Applecross, residents purchased a vacant site from NHS Highland, using the community asset transfer process and funding from a range of sources. Now, with the help of the Communities Housing Trust, instead of a vacant site, the community has three accessible homes next door to the general practice surgery.

From April next year, the devolution of powers over non-domestic rates and empty-property relief to local authorities could enable local councils to disincentivise absentee landlords, who far too often neglect the maintenance and security of vacant and derelict sites, as we have already heard.

Public bodies need land assembly powers—such as compulsory purchase and compulsory sale orders—that are effective, efficient and fair, in order to support the delivery of much-needed regeneration and infrastructure and the reuse of vacant land and property. Currently, implementation of these powers is patchy, with councils being understandably cautious about taking on ownership of sites that are often in very poor condition.

Councils should be encouraged by the numerous successful projects across Scotland

that have seen vacant and derelict sites taken on and redeveloped by communities. There is a real opportunity for local and national government to build partnerships with charities, co-operatives and membership organisations, which often have an inspiring vision for the new neighbourhoods that they want to shape.

It is also important to note that many councils are willing to exercise purchase powers, but do not have community groups with the capacity and confidence to undertake what are significant, specialist long-term projects. That is why the Scottish Greens have been making the case for more long-term support for revenue costs for community organisations and highlighting the importance of key enablers in the sector, including the Scottish land fund and the Communities Housing Trust. That is why the Bute house agreement commits the Scottish Government to doubling the Scottish land fund by the end of this parliamentary session, to prioritise bringing vacant and derelict land and property back into productive use with rural repopulation as a vital objective.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Due to the number of members who still wish to participate in the debate, including a few who have been moved to press their buttons since the debate started, I am minded to accept a motion without notice under rule 8.14.3 to extend the debate for up to 30 minutes. I invite Emma Harper to move the motion.

*Motion moved,*

That, under Rule 8.14.3, the debate be extended by up to 30 minutes.—[Emma Harper]

*Motion agreed to.*

18:03

**Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** I very much thank Emma Harper for securing the debate. I enjoyed listening to her eloquently setting the scene in her opening speech. It was a great contribution on the challenges and opportunities that derelict and vacant land brings to communities.

In my short contribution, I want to highlight a scenario in my constituency that, on the face of it, seems like a golden opportunity to transform a derelict site for community benefit. However, when we look under the surface, we see that it is more challenging.

As the daughter of a greengrocer, I am utterly loyal to community wealth-building approaches. Like many colleagues, I am lucky enough to represent an area that has independent shops, coffee shops, makers, designers, artisan bakeries and so on—you name it. There are lots of different members of the community who are invested in



bringing character and life to local spaces. Equally, what we define as vacant and derelict land can contribute to that character and life.

The Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities place principle sits at the heart of addressing the needs of communities and realising their full potential. Places are shaped by the way in which resources, services and assets are directed and used by the people who live and invest in them.

Aberdeen city, much like the rest of the UK, has a legacy of land contamination resulting from past industrial use, including in the historical oil and gas sector. Having said that, I note that the self-same energy sector is considered by some to have avoided the emergence of a bigger cohort of derelict and vacant land in the north-east over the years. Nevertheless, in circumstances involving contaminated land, local authorities are required

“to ... remove unacceptable risks to”

people

“and the environment”

and

“to seek to bring damaged land back into beneficial use”.

On that point, I highlight a scenario in my constituency. I have been working with constituents who live adjacent to an area of land that is owned by the local authority but which has, over many years, been leased as an industrial site. The oil and gas downturn led to the site being vacated and flattened, but the lease remains in place.

The site is now contaminated. In recent years, however, it has emerged as a natural habitat, hosting a range of animals and bird life. Local residents derive real pleasure from it, and there is a feeling of attachment and wellbeing connected to the space. Perversely, the leaseholder’s annual maintenance, which is to be applauded, can nevertheless remove some of the emerging habitat that is attracting wildlife into it. Efforts to date to explore how the status of the site can shift from contaminated land to community asset have proved to be very difficult, which perhaps demonstrates a lack of synergy, with the aspirations of community wealth building set against the legislative and policy framework around vacant and derelict land.

I welcome the Scottish Land Commission’s report “Transforming Scotland’s Approach to Vacant and Derelict Land”, and I note the recommendations around

“Aligning Policy to Support Delivery”,

including the recommendation that

“action should be taken to make it easier to overcome ownership barriers to land reuse.”

I completely agree with that recommendation.

However, in the case that I outlined, the issue is made more complex by the leased status of the land and by the understandable hesitation around—as I anticipate—its status changing. Realistically, that is a very difficult situation for community members to grapple with. I am therefore interested in hearing the minister’s thoughts on that particular scenario, and I would be pleased to engage further on the issue down the line.

I am grateful to Emma Harper for bringing the debate to the chamber, and I look forward to working on the issue in my constituency in the future.

18:08

**Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab):** I thank Emma Harper for bringing the debate to the chamber. As a trustee of the Glasgow City Heritage Trust, I have a strong personal passion for the issue. Indeed, Glasgow has long been synonymous with its architectural beauty and the grandeur of its buildings, which make it one of the most handsome urban cityscapes in the world. It is testament to previous generations of enlightened Glaswegians that we remain blessed by the legacy of geniuses such as Alexander “Greek” Thomson, James Miller, John James Burnet and Charles Rennie Mackintosh. They were able to flourish in the city of Glasgow due to a potent combination of inspired patrons, including the Corporation of Glasgow, who understood the enduring value of good design, and the design rules that were devised by the first city architect, John Carrick, which ensured that Glasgow followed a rigorous plan that was driven by the Glasgow City Improvement Trust and gave rise to a dense grid of the tenement streets that are so fundamental to our city’s identity.

Although we admire and adore the product of that architectural golden age and need to do everything that we can to preserve and protect it today, it is true that current planning law would not enable it to be built today—in fact, it would prevent that from happening. That is one of the great ironies: the things that we cherish and the communities that we like the most in our city are unable to be replicated because of current planning law. It is a great disappointment that we have not been able to address that in national planning framework 4.

The work of organisations such as the Glasgow City Heritage Trust, which was established 15 years ago, in 2007, is pivotal.

**Emma Harper:** I fed into the national planning framework draft strategy on tackling vacant and abandoned land and buildings. Does the member agree that we need to continue to consider those issues and make sure that powers are created to tackle problem eyesore sites?

**Paul Sweeney:** I absolutely agree with the member. A major issue is that previous generations had plot-based development rules for planning. A city plan was laid out and the city was built up progressively. Private investors were invited to build it up in that planned sequence by the city architect, in this instance, or the city improvement trust, and many of those developments were sponsored by the city.

However, today, our planning system is fundamentally discretionary. All the bases on which buildings are designed and developed are left in the hands of developers. There is no code of design, no code for how a building should look in relation to the community and no code on the materials that should be used. It is very arbitrary, and buildings are often value engineered to the point of not being well designed at all, which is a major concern.

There are perverse incentives at the heart of our planning system that drive perverse behaviour. For example, in Glasgow, 108 of our more than 1,800 listed buildings are on the buildings at risk register for Scotland. That is quite a high rate. A major impediment to bringing back into use the buildings that are at risk, which are of architectural and heritage value, is the fact that to do so incurs a VAT rate of 20 per cent, whereas knocking the building down and building it from scratch incurs no VAT. That is a perverse incentive—it is what is known as a conservation deficit—and it often militates against bringing potentially fantastic buildings back into use.

As members have done in the debate, I could rhyme off a list of such buildings in Glasgow, not least the Springburn winter gardens in Springburn park, which I have been desperately trying to bring back into active use for more than 10 years, but I continue to be frustrated in that goal. One of the major impediments relates to the VAT issue and the conservation deficit. The usual way to deal with that is to apply for funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the regeneration capital grant fund or the UK Government's levelling up fund, as Glasgow is doing for the People's Palace. The fundamental problem with that is that it is a lottery, and there will always be losers in such a process.

I do not understand why the Scottish Government cannot think more laterally about the issue and say, "These buildings have long-term value. How do we measure the value of these restored assets? How do we guarantee these

buildings as incredible, irreplaceable and precious parts of our built heritage?" It needs to recognise that throwing grants at the issue on an arbitrary lottery-type basis will not work and will not be sustainable in the long term.

The Glasgow City Heritage Trust's annual budget barely touches the sides of the scale of the problem in Glasgow: 70,000 tenements need £3 billion-worth of repairs. At the rate at which the trust is funded, it would take 2,000 years to do that. We need to seriously up our game in Scotland on how we resource this. A national plan should not involve throwing money at projects that will not work or be viable; it should involve providing initial investment that can, over 100 years, be earned back. Revenue from council tax, non-domestic rates and rent would come back into the city and the urban community. Property values would rise in the area, and communities that would otherwise suffer terribly would be reinvigorated, because a higher proportion of the buildings that are at risk are in the poorest districts of our towns and cities.

In that regard, it is important that the Government considers ways of dealing with the conservation deficit problem in Scotland—it should not simply extend the grant funding—because it is a major issue that holds up the potential rejuvenation of thousands of amazing architectural edifices in our cities and towns.

18:13

**Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP):** I thank my colleague, Emma Harper, for bringing the issue to the Parliament's attention. It is high time for this long-standing and difficult problem to be tackled and solved. The debate has come at a good time. In recent years, I have been trying to do some work on the issue in my constituency. My focus is on empty or abandoned shops, but there are a number of pieces of land that are no better than waste ground. Sadly, some sites in current use have little or no maintenance to keep them in good order.

We all know particular buildings—usually empty shops—that do not exactly contribute positively to the look and feel of our cities, towns and villages. Some of them are, in fact, middens—a good Scots word, which I am using deliberately because that is what they are. Their owners should be ashamed of themselves but sadly, they are not, which is one of the key problems. As Emma Harper has said, those properties are often owned by uncontactable individuals or corporations who do not give a jot about our towns—they might never even have visited them—and who hide behind agents who allegedly manage the properties for them. Some properties are in local ownership, but it is very

difficult to get hold of the landlords to ask them to take some action, even to clean up the properties.

I recently went on a walk through my town of Kilmarnock with two council officials—to whom I was very grateful—and we saw many of those examples for ourselves. What became clear was how little falls under the jurisdiction of the local authority: members have referred to the local authority's powers to act over dangerous buildings and so on, but local authority powers in relation to amenity or filthy buildings are limited, and work usually ends up costing the public purse although it is the owner's responsibility to act.

Where does the answer lie? Neither I nor my council colleagues are convinced that it lies in granting more powers—in relation to amenity or otherwise—to the planning authorities. That always seems to end up in legal disputes, especially when we are talking about subjective matters that deal with attractiveness or ugliness. Who would define what those things actually mean? Ultimately, the owners usually do not have funds or resources available to take any action to remedy the situation.

The recent work on developing our national planning framework will be a powerful tool for local communities to take forward plans to revitalise our towns and create community spaces, as we have done successfully in Kilmarnock already. However, I do not think that NPF4 can solve the problem, so those awful sites will remain and will continue to let us all down.

We need new thinking around some kind of clean-up fund, or town centre or community bond fund. We could ask local traders and those absentee landlords, if we can ever track them down, to put a small amount of money aside in a voluntary fund that would include some public money, too, if that was possible. We could also encourage public donations. The solution might lie in promoting a voluntary town centre clean-up fund to which everybody could contribute.

After all, our towns, cities and villages belong to the people who live in them all their lives, and it is in everyone's interest—people, traders, absent owners, and probably the local authority—to work together to be part of the solution to that particular problem. All our buildings and parcels of land should have a positive purpose and really contribute to the vitality of our towns.

**Paul Sweeney:** Will the member give way?

**Willie Coffey:** I am just coming to the end of my speech, but I would be pleased to hear what the member has to say.

**Paul Sweeney:** I thank the member for his speech so far, which has been really interesting. Does he recognise that the solution to the problem

that he describes might be a heritage levy on new development areas, such as conservation areas, which could help contribute to the common good?

Built Environment Forum Scotland identified another potential solution, around having common sinking funds for residential and—potentially—commercial properties, so that common repairs are well funded in advance, instead of a massive amount of money suddenly having to be spent in reaction to the failure of a building or structure.

**Willie Coffey:** They are all potentially good ideas. We have talked about some of them with council officials. We wanted to gauge what their reaction might be to the setting aside of advance funding for those kinds of purposes. That solution might work, and I hope that some of those plans come to fruition.

I hope that my speech has given the minister and members some food for thought.

I thank Emma Harper for bringing the issue to our attention and sincerely hope that we can make real progress on it in the coming years, because our cities, towns and villages deserve nothing less.

18:19

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** Listening to many speeches from SNP members, you would hardly imagine that they have been in power for 15 years. These problems have not arrived in the past few weeks or months; we have been living and dealing with them for a long time. Emma Harper has highlighted the inadequacies of her own Government after 15 years of its being in power—she has highlighted the powers that local authorities do and do not have, so there is a role here for the Scottish Government.

Paul Sweeney gave a marvellous speech in which he highlighted the need for the Government to be more imaginative and more flexible in how it deals with such things. I was absolutely delighted to hear from Jackie Dunbar that there is a Brian Adam Road. I was astonished, but not entirely surprised, to hear the minister say that the person to blame for all the problems that we have talked about in the debate is Mrs Thatcher. My goodness me, how predictable, and how lame, was that?

We live in one of the most beautiful countries in the world. In fact, Scotland is regularly acclaimed as the most beautiful country in the world. Our landscape makes all of us feel proud. Something inside us warms up when we see the beautiful scenery that our country is renowned for around the world.

As parliamentarians, we have been appointed by our fellow Scots to be guardians of Scotland's natural beauty. Just as previous generations have preserved our nation's landscape so that we can

enjoy it, we have a responsibility to conserve the beauty of our built environment, so that future generations can enjoy it as well.

However, we must not kid ourselves when we talk about the beauty of Scotland. Not every fibre of Scotland is beautiful. I wish that I could say otherwise. As has been mentioned in the speeches, there are many parts of the country in which land not only is unused but is an eyesore. Failure to address that problem is nothing short of a levelling-down approach. There is such a thing as entropy—it is real. That kind of neglect from public bodies, agencies and councils, as well as owners, comes from an uncaring attitude that says to people that their environment, their lives and their wellbeing are less important than the environment, lives and wellbeing of others. The way that many places in central Scotland have been neglected is Scotland's shame: policymakers, who live in nice, pleasant, suburban areas are happy to leave their fellow Scots in the worst kinds of squalor. Rather than accepting the status quo, the Scottish Government should embrace a true levelling-up agenda, empowering people and authorities and building buildings that complement our country's natural beauty.

As is already known, we do not have enough houses in Scotland. For far too long, we have not been building enough homes. Councils and Governments take too long to sell off unused land. There is a register of land in the public sector that could be usefully utilised to build more homes. As we have heard, buildings that have been declared surplus to requirements by councils take far too long to sell. We have not been imaginative enough, for example, to adapt buildings on our high streets to accommodate housing. Why do we just keep talking about the issue without doing something about it?

**Colin Smyth:** Stephen Kerr's point is valid, but does he accept that, when it comes to investing in regenerating a building in a town centre—for example, for housing—one of the disincentives is the fact that the level of VAT that is levied on existing buildings is higher than the VAT on a new build out of town? That is a perverse disincentive to tackling the problem of housing. Maybe he can have a word with his party to see whether we can address that and reduce VAT on regenerating existing buildings to the same level as that on new builds.

**Stephen Kerr:** I am happy to address any perverse illogicalities around the need for us to take action on the areas that I and other members have highlighted. What we are seeing, if I may coin a phrase, is an anti-growth coalition of people who are stopping those things from happening.

We cannot just champion more housing. As Paul Sweeney touched on, the housing that we

build must promote community—of the sort that we used to have in a country that was, and should be, proud of its sense of community—rather than people living inside their own bubble, which happens too often. We must champion energy-efficient housing, so that those buildings serve us for generations to come.

We must also champion the right type of housing: beautiful houses that people want to live in, in beautiful neighbourhoods. Beauty should be at the heart of public discourse. It should be part of our conversation about housing, development and spaces. As the great philosopher Roger Scruton put it,

“we are losing beauty, and there is a danger that with it we will lose the meaning of life.”

I close with the words of a friend of mine, Sir John Hayes—not of this parish, but of the House of Commons—whose ideas are driven by inordinate common sense.

He said:

“Sadly, we live in an age that is dull and utilitarian and in which mystery and magic are extraordinarily unfashionable. It is odd that that should be, for it was not true for most of our history, and has not been so for most great civilisations. It is unusual to be as utilitarian as we are, but now it is time for a change—for a renaissance. It is time for beauty to be put back at the heart of Government policy.”—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 30 October 2018; Vol 648, c 287WH.]

Sir John Hayes is right, and we can start by tackling the dereliction that we see all too much of around us.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We have extended the debate by half an hour, but we are at risk of going beyond that if we are not careful.

18:25

**Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP):** I thank Emma Harper for introducing the debate and for allowing us to talk about issues to do with vacant and derelict land, and neglected and abandoned buildings in our communities. The issues have come through strongly in the debate—such sites are blights on our communities. I was motivated to make this unscheduled speech because of my experiences as constituency MSP for Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn.

I will start off by talking about when MSPs go and talk to local authorities about buildings being unsafe. I could pick several examples, but I will talk about the Maryhill tavern and the Redan pub building on Maryhill Road, which are unsafe and are eyesores, and the Talisman pub in Springburn, which was also an eyesore but has, thankfully, been demolished.

When we go to local authorities about such buildings, they look at whether the building is structurally unsafe. That is, they look at whether it will fall down and whether bits will continue to fall off the building, but not at whether it is accessible to kids and whether reasonable mitigations have been put in place to stop kids getting in there, or at whether it is a blight on the urban landscape. We might have to look again at what we deem to be safe and acceptable for communities. I wanted to put that point on the record.

I will also say a little bit about compulsory purchase orders. Clearly, it is easier to secure one if there is a strategic plan for use of the building or the land that the building sits on. The plan would, preferably, be a community-led strategic plan, as happened in respect of the now-demolished Talisman pub. I declare an interest in that the relevant community plan was formed in part by the Springburn regeneration forum, of which I am a co-founder, and Spirit of Springburn, of which I am a trustee. However, I take no credit for that achievement, because I facilitated others in the community holding a charrette to deliver the recommendation that the derelict eyesore that was the Talisman must go. The local authority moved for a compulsory purchase order, and the owner suddenly thought, "I'll get the site demolished myself rather than face the threat of a compulsory purchase order." That was a positive impact.

**Paul Sweeney:** Will the member give way?

**Bob Doris:** I am sorry, Mr Sweeney, but I can do so only if I can get the time back.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Be very brief, Mr Sweeney.

**Paul Sweeney:** I thank Bob Doris for his contribution. Does he recognise that, 10 years since the demolition of Springburn public halls, one of the major concerns in the city of Glasgow is about buildings that are in council ownership that remain derelict and continue to blight areas including Springburn?

**Bob Doris:** I am happy to acknowledge that issue, which has transcended all political persuasions in local government across a long period.

I will talk about compulsory purchase orders in relation to the Maryhill tavern and the Redan building on Maryhill road, which are now going to happen in order to allow us to connect with regenerational work in Kilmun Street, Barrisdale Road and Lyndale Street. They have been lying empty on wasteland for far too long, and the orders are part of a transformational long-term regeneration-area approach. There are lots of good things happening, but it will all take time, with planned and careful consideration and massive investment by Glasgow City Council and the

Scottish Government. We are also hearing that some levelling-up funds might be contributed, as well. Things can happen.

I will also mention where things have happened. There is a new community hub in Royston that includes a wonderful new community centre and food pantry. That is supported by money from the Scottish land fund, Glasgow City Council and the Scottish Government's capital regeneration fund. There is also the previously derelict "triangle site" in Royston, for which we got significant amounts of money from the land fund and the Scottish Government to make a park on the hill, where previously there were blights and eyesores.

We also have to look at the issue in connection with how we use green space. For example, right next to me at Blackhill Road, there was to be a massive development of green space on which up to 1,000 properties were to be built. I declare another interest, because I have a direct interest in that development. If you offer private developers the opportunity to build 1,000 properties on green space, guess what? They will not invest in brownfield, vacant and derelict land sites. I am glad that an end was put to that potential development.

This has been an incredibly constructive debate, although Mr Kerr and Mr Carson let themselves down a bit. The debate was never to be tribal or party political; it is about coming together as a Parliament to do what we can to improve the communities that we serve.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Tom Arthur to respond to the debate. Minister, you have 7 minutes or so.

18:30

**The Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth (Tom Arthur):** Thank you, Presiding Officer. I have registered the tone of your voice underscoring "7 minutes", which is far too short a time, in responding, in which to do justice to an excellent debate. We have had a range of interesting contributions from members. I value, and undertake to reflect carefully on, the comments that have been made, and to engage with my officials and other stakeholders on those points.

I thank Emma Harper for bringing the debate to the Parliament and affording us the opportunity to discuss the topic. I also recognise the work of the vacant and derelict land task force, which is playing an important role in informing not only the debate but the work that the Government is doing.

The Scottish Government is undertaking a broad range of work. We recently published a revised draft of the national planning framework 4,

which seeks to get us back to a plan-led system, in particular for housing. I note that the policies on green belt, brownfield, vacant and derelict land and empty buildings align with much of what members have said.

As well as what we are doing on planning policy, we are working to ensure that we have a properly resourced planning system. That is a challenge in terms not just of fiscal resource but of ensuring that we have enough planners. The scale of the challenge in recruitment of planners is not unique to Scotland. However, we are working closely with the planning performance high-level group on the action that we are taking. With partners including the Royal Town Planning Institute, Heads of Planning Scotland and the Improvement Service, we have published the “Future Planners Project Report” and are working to implement it.

We are also having constructive engagement with the private sector so that we can do more to promote getting people into planning. As I said at the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee at the end of last month, planning is a wonderful profession for any young person to go into and it affords people an opportunity to play a key role in shaping their places.

We are not just making policy; we are backing it up with funding. We have the place-based investment programme, which includes the regeneration capital grant fund, which goes back to 2013. With the PBIP, that represents, over the course of this parliamentary session, £325 million of capital investment, which is making a difference.

We have also launched the vacant and derelict land improvement programme, which is worth £50 million over this parliamentary session. I was delighted to be at Clyde Gateway a few weeks back to attend the official opening of the first project to be completed following funding from the vacant and derelict land improvement programme. That is an important resource; we recognise that there can, given our industrial heritage, be significant challenges in decontamination and remediation of land. The programme can play an important part in de-risking and in leveraging in investment from the other sectors.

**Paul Sweeney:** Does the minister agree that the Clyde Gateway is an interesting model? Clyde Gateway is unique in being the only public development corporation left in Scotland. Perhaps the model could be emulated on a grander scale—for Glasgow as a whole and perhaps at national level—to bring distressed assets back into use.

**Tom Arthur:** I acknowledge what Paul Sweeney has said. I have been incredibly impressed with what I have seen at Clyde Gateway, particularly in respect of the bold and

almost entrepreneurial spirit in its vision for the area. There is certainly something in Mr Sweeney’s suggestion that that model could play a bigger role and be replicated, so that its culture, vision and attitude can better inform how the public sector as a whole engages in long-term redevelopment projects.

Emma Harper asked how we can use current legislation to deal effectively with VDL. A number of members mentioned compulsory purchase orders and the possibility of compulsory sales orders. Through our delivery programme for NPF4, we have a commitment to consider how we can update legislation on CPOs. Within that programme of work, we will consider the introduction of CSOs. As members will appreciate, it is an extremely complex subject that requires careful consideration. However, I recognise that there is a keen interest in it. I also acknowledge the criticism that existing CPO provisions are somewhat dated and challenging to use. As such, careful consideration of how we can update those powers is warranted to ensure that all our local authorities are equipped with the legislative tools that they require to effect the outcomes that we want.

Mr Carson touched on permitted development rights for residential conversions. We recently concluded a consultation on permitted development rights. That consultation responded to some of the recommendations from the town centre review and covered a range of areas, including use-class orders. We will shortly publish our decisions based on that consultation and will take legislative action. I stress that I am not minded to pursue permitted development rights for residential conversion, because housing is so significant that it should remain within the planning system.

A number of members mentioned Midsteeple Quarter. I was delighted to visit Midsteeple earlier this year and am delighted that the Scottish Government has been able to support the project through the place-based investment programme and the empowering communities programme. The project is a great example of a community taking ownership and driving change forward, as Mr Smyth said. People have worked shop by shop to take back their high street.

That leads to a broader point about community wealth building, which builds on the place principle and represents the maturation of our redevelopment and regeneration process. The challenges that we face in our high streets and with vacant and derelict land are a reflection of an underlying economic model that has often been about wealth extraction. Owners who do not live in the localities where their premises are do not have a stake. Land and property are key pillars of

community wealth building. I want to see more people taking ownership of assets in communities. That is a key ambition. There will be an opportunity to consider that further during the Government debate on asset transfer requests that I will lead tomorrow.

Audrey Nicoll raised a number of issues. I would be happy to meet her to discuss the specific points that she raised.

I acknowledge Paul Sweeney's long-standing passion for the subject. He made a fascinating and provocative speech. I wrestle in my own mind with the fact that the grandeur of Glasgow comes from an era of permissive regulation—before we had the statutory system that was brought in by 1909, 1929 and 1934 planning legislation—which was also an age in which we had the terrible and appalling housing conditions that prompted development of the modern planning system in 1947, because of concerns about public health.

Mr Sweeney also raised some interesting points about design. We will look at the existing national design codes as part of our delivery programme for NPF4.

I am conscious that time is against me and that the debate has already been extended. I thank all members for their contributions—in particular, I thank Emma Harper for bringing the debate to the chamber.

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

*Meeting closed at 18:37.*





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Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

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