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Thursday 26 January 2023

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 26 January 2023

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

General Question Time

Road Improvements (A77 and A70)

1. Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what road improvements are being carried out on the A77 and A70 to address any challenges faced by road users. (S6O-01828)

The Minister for Transport (Jenny Gilruth): The Scottish Government continues to invest in the safe and efficient operation of the A77. Planned improvements for 2023 include slope stability works at Glengall, the upgrade of a number of existing lay-bys, upgrades of the Whitlets and Dutch House roundabouts and improvements to existing drainage at Cairnyan. Since 2007, the Scottish Government has invested approximately £64 million in five separate road schemes on the A77, including the recent completion of the £29 million Maybole bypass, which opened in January 2022.

The A70 is a local authority road.

Sharon Dowey: The A77 is a vital trade link between the central belt, Ayrshire and Northern Ireland, and the A70 could become a strategic link into the heart of Rabbin Burns's homeland in Ayrshire. They are very important roads for local people, trade and tourism. The lack of good public transport links means that people rely on the A70 and the A77, but the roads are crumbling and they are a major safety concern, especially on dark winter nights. Will the Scottish National Party focus on improving those vital roads, or has its coalition deal with the Greens stopped any chance of extra investment in the roads in Ayrshire?

Jenny Gilruth: I very much understand the sentiment of Ms Dowey's question. We have invested, particularly in the A77, and I will detail some of the spend in relation to maintenance thus far.

I recognise the challenges that Ms Dowey has outlined in relation to connectivity and public transport. Those challenges exist across Scotland currently, which is why I am focused on how we can better improve delivery of the modal shift from car to rail and bus. One of the ways in which we can do that is through our very generous concessionary bus travel scheme, which means

that almost half of the population of Scotland can travel free by bus.

On the specifics of Ms Dowey's question in relation to the A77, recommendation 40 of strategic transport projects review 2, which was published in December last year, includes improvements on the A77. The cabinet secretary will deliver a statement to that end later today.

On the maintenance spend, in 2022-23, investment has continued. So far this year, £9 million has been spent specifically on the A77. This year alone, the following schemes have been completed: the north end of the Kilmarnock bypass has been resurfaced; the A77 to the B7038 Coodham interchange has been resurfaced; and we have done resurfacing at Dutch House, as I mentioned—

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Briefly, please, minister.

Jenny Gilruth: I will not go through the further detail—I think that Ms Dowey has asked me a written parliamentary question on the matter. However, I hope that that reassures her about the level of Government investment in the routes that she has asked about.

Siobhian Brown (Ayr) (SNP): The Maybole bypass on the A77, which opened in February last year, represented £29 million of Scottish Government investment and was described as “a dream come true” by those who campaigned for it. Does the Scottish Government have any data on, or means of assessing, the difference that the project has made to the experience of road users?

Jenny Gilruth: I recall opening the Maybole bypass at this time last year, and I know how significantly transformative the project has already been for the local community. Transport Scotland is planning to undertake an evaluation of the bypass this year. We will look at data collection from the spring, which will be in line with the Scottish trunk road infrastructure project evaluation, which is hugely important. It will look at the scheme's objectives, its operation and the environment. The completed evaluation will be published on Transport Scotland's website, and a further evaluation will be undertaken three years after the scheme's opening.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill

2. Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill, including the latest discussions it has had with the United Kingdom Government. (S6O-01829)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville): Preparations for the reconsideration stage are well under way. They include engagement with UK Government officials on proposed amendments to bring the bill within legislative competence.

Discussions with UK Government officials currently focus on what the Supreme Court judgment means for the application of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child compatibility duty when a public authority is acting under powers conferred by UK acts in devolved areas. My officials are exploring options, and Parliament will be updated on what that means for the provisions in the bill after the options have been carefully considered. The Scottish Government remains absolutely committed to incorporating the UNCRC into Scots law as far as is possible within devolved competence.

Martin Whitfield: The minutes of the meetings between Government representatives and the various committees and groups that are involved in the bill show that there have been varying responses to people who have asked for updates on the bill. In September, the Scottish Government was

“still on track to have the ... Bill ... by the end of the ... year”.

In October, the position was:

“We therefore have no timeline as yet”.

In November, it was:

“We can’t say whether the amended Bill will be presented to Parliament before the end of the year”.

Again in October, the position was:

“we are fairly confident that the amendments we have proposed will address legislative competence.”

What is the position, cabinet secretary? Have amendments been drafted, are they sitting with the UK Government, and what is the deadline for a response from the UK Government on this?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I assure Mr Whitfield that we have been looking at detailed amendments. I point out to him that we are not the only player in this. The difficulty is that it is exceptionally complex when we have to consider not just what is happening with, and the views of, the Scottish Government, but also the sovereignty of the UK Parliament and the Supreme Court judgment.

I appreciate that it has taken longer than any of us would have hoped. However, particularly given the overall approach of the UK Government to the powers of the Scottish Parliament, I think that it is very important that we understand the views of the UK Government. We are taking time to ensure that we do and that we understand whether they have implications for how we amend the bill.

I assure the member that our programme of work to embed children’s rights continues at pace and that it is not reliant on the development of the bill. That work is continuing.

The Presiding Officer: Before we move to question 3, I emphasise how helpful it would be if questions and responses were concise.

Energy Sector Workforce (Retraining and Upskilling)

3. Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what engagement it has had with stakeholders regarding retraining and upskilling the north-east energy sector workforce. (S6O-01830)

The Minister for Just Transition, Employment and Fair Work (Richard Lochhead): The oil and gas sector and its highly skilled workforce have long been at the forefront of energy innovation and have a really important role to play in Scotland’s energy transition. On 2 November, in partnership with industry and Skills Development Scotland, we held an offshore energy skills summit with key stakeholders, which focused on delivering a just transition for the offshore energy workforce. It included sharing views and insights, encouraging greater collaboration and pinpointing where more action is required.

Throughout our recently published draft energy strategy and just transition plan, we have also set out a pathway to ensuring a fair and just transition for our energy workforce.

Audrey Nicoll: During a recent visit to a geodata specialist company in the north-east, I heard about how remote technologies are offering opportunities for workforces to be located elsewhere, in some cases outwith Scotland. Can the minister outline how the Scottish Government is supporting businesses to utilise their extensive knowledge base in subsea marine engineering, including by developing remote technologies, while at the same time attracting and securing the future workforce in the north-east and across Scotland?

Richard Lochhead: I have visited many companies that are involved in taking forward such technologies. It is incredible to see the innovation that is out there, particularly in the north-east of Scotland, in the North Sea sector, where people are looking at opportunities in clean energy and renewable energy as part of the energy transition.

In Scotland, we have the most advanced hub in Europe for the testing and demonstration of green energy technologies. We are, we hope, ideally placed to both shape and benefit from the future potential of the global marine energy market. We

have also supported a number of initiatives, such as by providing £18.25 million to Wave Energy Scotland and £75 million to the energy transition fund. A number of other measures are under way, many of which are referred to in the draft plan, which, as I mentioned, has just been published. It is a really important agenda that we are attempting to support.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): The energy strategy trumpets a figure of 77,000 local low-carbon energy jobs by 2050. However, the Scottish Government has no idea what those jobs will be, no road map for how they will be delivered, and no idea of their average salaries and thus whether they will be comparable to the current jobs in the energy sector. Does the minister therefore understand why the energy strategy was also forced to report that the majority of respondents to the survey tended to express low confidence in a just transition for the sector and that the oil and gas workers believe that the impact on their jobs will be negative?

Richard Lochhead: I point out to the member that it is not that the Scottish Government is simply trumpeting those figures, as he phrases it; they are the result of research from the likes of Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen, in his region. I suggest that he visit that esteemed university and discuss with it the research that we are quoting in our draft plan. That says that it is estimated that the number of jobs can go from 19,000 in 2019 to 77,000 by 2050 as a result of the just energy transition. In terms of the number of low-carbon jobs, that is a net gain in jobs for the member's region. He should be celebrating that and the measures that are being taken by this Government to make that a reality, and he should speak to the many organisations out there that agree with the Scottish Government that the plan has massive potential to deliver new jobs for the member's constituents.

The Presiding Officer: Question 4 has been withdrawn.

Rail Patronage (Mid Scotland and Fife)

5. Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government how it is encouraging increased patronage on rail routes serving Mid Scotland and Fife. (S6O-01832)

The Minister for Transport (Jenny Gilruth): The Scottish Government is investing in the new railway to Cameron Bridge and Leven and in the electrification of rail services in Fife. ScotRail's recently launched half-price ticket offer is just one way in which Scottish Government funding is ensuring that a publicly owned and operated ScotRail can deliver real benefits and savings for passengers. In addition, once it is launched, the ScotRail peak fares pilot will apply to all routes for

the whole six months, which will encourage people back to rail.

Claire Baker: As the minister knows, the cost of peak rail travel remains prohibitively expensive for many people. She will also know that, in Fife, the cost per mile is more expensive than it is in the rest of Scotland, and we have some of the most restrictive peak travel measures in place.

In her reply, the minister said that the peak fares pilot will apply to all routes. At a committee meeting last week, the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport threw that into doubt by saying that there were not the resources to provide for every route so the pilot would be limited to particular routes.

In *The Courier* last week, a spokesperson for the Scottish Government said that the pilot would apply to all routes, so can the minister give me confidence by clarifying that it will apply to all routes across Mid Scotland and Fife—

The Presiding Officer: Briefly, Ms Baker.

Claire Baker: —because the cabinet secretary created confusion last week?

Jenny Gilruth: I recognise the point that Ms Baker makes. At Mr Matheson's appearance last week, he reiterated the Scottish Government's commitment to remove peak fares via a six-month pilot. For clarification, the peak fares pilot will apply to all routes for the full six months during the next financial year. It is true to say that work on the precise methodology and design is on-going, and my officials in Transport Scotland are working very closely with Scottish Rail Holdings and ScotRail to deliver maximum benefit. I reiterate that the pilot, backed by £15 million of Scottish Government investment, will apply to all ScotRail routes for the whole six months. I hope that that reassures the member.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): Last June, in relation to the Scottish transport appraisal guidance, I asked the minister when we would get a decision on the proposal for a Newburgh railway station. She promised to share the timescales with me. We are now six months on, so when will we get a decision?

Jenny Gilruth: As far as I understand it, the Newburgh detailed options appraisal is currently being reviewed by officials and a response will be provided imminently. Transport Scotland officials have been working to give advice more broadly to SEStran—the South East of Scotland Transport Partnership—at key stages of the on-going appraisal. I am more than happy to write to Mr Rennie with an update on that work, but it is on-going, as I have outlined.

Transport Connectivity (Islands)

6. Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how it will improve transport connectivity for Scotland's islands. (S6O-01833)

The Minister for Transport (Jenny Gilruth): The Scottish Government is taking forward a range of actions to improve connectivity for our island communities. Work on the islands connectivity plan is under way. The draft long-term plan for vessels and ports was published in December 2022, with formal public consultation to begin this year. Earlier this month, I announced further significant investment in our ferry network, with a commitment to four new major vessels to serve Islay and the Skye triangle routes, alongside further port investment at Tarbert, Lochmaddy and Uig. I also recently announced a six-month fare freeze on our ferry networks.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: The minister will not need reminding that Scotland's ferry fleet is ageing and increasingly unreliable, with breakdowns often leaving communities cut off. As has been said in the chamber far too many times, we need serious investment in our ferry fleet, and we need it to start now and to be on-going.

We should also give consideration to fixed links, assess the economic and social benefits from feasible fixed links and consult island communities on which transport options they want. How is the Scottish Government undertaking work on fixed links for some of our islands and some of our mainland communities? How is it engaging with local stakeholders, including residents and businesses?

Jenny Gilruth: On Monday, I was in Arran to engage with the local community there. As transport minister, I engage regularly with local communities on the issues that the member has raised.

It is worth pointing out that there has been significant investment from the Government. In the past year alone, we have bought and deployed the additional vessel MV Loch Frisa; we have chartered the MV Arrow to provide additional capacity on the network; we have made significant progress on the construction of vessels 801 and 802; we have commissioned two new vessels for Islay; and we have progressed additional investment in our key ports and harbours.

I mentioned in my initial response that Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd will be given additional funding to the tune of £150 million to provide two further major vessels. That is important because it will bring a degree of standardisation to the fleet.

On the member's other point, fixed links were considered in the second strategic transport projects review—STPR2. The cabinet secretary will give an update on that later this afternoon, and I am sure that he will be able to provide the member with further detail.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Orkney ferries are old and in need of replacement. The council has been asking for assistance from the Scottish Government for many years but is yet to receive it. Will the Scottish Government agree to run those services now or, at the very least, to provide access for CMAL to replace the ferries and lease them back to the council?

Jenny Gilruth: I did not quite catch the start of Ms Grant's question. In relation to local authority ferries, I recognise some of the financial challenges. It is worth saying that we provide significant funding to support local authorities in delivering those vessels. We have provided more than £136 million in the past five years alone to support the running of those services.

As part of the budget process, the Deputy First Minister has already committed to further work with Shetland and Orkney, to which the member alluded, to develop their fleet-replacement plans, in recognition of the challenges that those islands face.

We are aware of the growing need for local authorities to replace their ageing ferry fleets and infrastructure. Although responsibility for funding replacement infrastructure remains wholly with councils, we are committed to continuing that engagement, and I look forward to the outcome of the on-going work with my officials in Transport Scotland in relation to Orkney and Shetland.

Sexual Harassment and Abuse

7. Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on zero tolerance of sexual harassment and supporting victims of abuse. (S6O-01834)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans (Keith Brown): The Scottish Government is committed to building a safer Scotland that is free of sexual harassment and sexist behaviour. We are determined to tackle the scourge of sexual harassment wherever it happens, whether in public spaces, places of education or workplaces.

Through Scotland's equally safe strategy, we are tackling the underlying attitudes, inequalities and culture that perpetuate that behaviour. We also support victims of abuse by investing record levels of funding, including significant levels of funding in front-line services, to support victims of violence against women and girls.

Annie Wells: If the Scottish National Party Government has zero tolerance of sexual harassment and supports victims of abuse, why was Patrick Grady allowed back into the SNP after having been suspended for sexual assault?

His victim said:

“The decision to give Grady his job back while I've lost mine is a slap in the face to anyone who has experienced sexual harassment.”

What does the Government have to say to the person whom Patrick Grady abused?

The Presiding Officer: I remind members that questions that are put to Scottish Government ministers must be on matters for which the Scottish Government has general responsibility. We will therefore move to the next question.

Gender Pay Gap

8. Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it is tackling the gender pay gap. (S6O-01835)

The Minister for Just Transition, Employment and Fair Work (Richard Lochhead): In 2022, Scotland's median gender pay gap for full-time employees was 3.7 per cent, which was lower than the figure for the United Kingdom, which was 8.3 per cent. That has been the case since 2003.

We are not complacent, so we are undertaking a range of actions, which include investing £15 million in the coming year to contribute to the design of a year-round system of school-age childcare for families on the lowest incomes; providing an additional £20.4 million for local carer support in 2022-23; and providing up to £700,000 of funding to Close the Gap from 2021 to 2024 and £220,000 to Flexibility Works in 2022-23 to support employers to address pay gaps and offer flexible working.

Gillian Martin: I thank the minister for that answer, which is proof that progressive policies are making a difference.

During the Economy, Jobs and Fair Work Committee's inquiry into the gender pay gap in the previous session of Parliament, we found that social care workers are disproportionately female and that low pay in that sector contributes to our gender pay gap. How do the proposals for the national care service seek to improve pay and conditions for that mainly female workforce? How might an improved care offer mean that fewer women need to leave work to meet previously unmet caring responsibilities?

Richard Lochhead: The fair work agenda is at the heart of the Government's proposals for a national care service. From April 2023, adult social

care workers' pay will increase to a minimum of £10.90 an hour, which represents a 14.7 per cent increase in the past two years. We will transfer £100 million to deliver that uplift. That will take recurring funding for those workers to £600 million a year.

The national care service will pave the way for the introduction of full collective bargaining across the social care sector, which will further support improved pay and standardised terms and conditions.

I hope that that reassures Gillian Martin that fair work is, indeed, at the heart of our motivation for setting up a national care service.

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

Women's Prisons (Rapists)

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

Should a convicted rapist ever serve time in a women's prison?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I point to the fact that some matters that we will discuss during today's First Minister's question time are sub judice. However, the issues raised are operational matters for the Scottish Prison Service and, given understandable concerns that have been raised, it is important that I address them. I will take some time to set out the situation and answer Douglas Ross's question directly and very clearly.

In general, first, any prisoner who poses a risk of sexual offending is segregated from other prisoners, including during any period of risk assessment.

Secondly, there is no automatic right for a trans woman who is convicted of a crime to serve their sentence in a female prison, even if they have a gender recognition certificate. Every case is subject to rigorous individual risk assessment and, as part of that, the safety of other prisoners is paramount.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I heard the chief executive of Rape Crisis Scotland say yesterday,

"I don't see how it's possible to have a rapist within a female prison",

and I am very clear that I agree with that statement. Bearing in mind what I have just said about the importance of individualised risk assessment as a general principle and presumption, that statement is correct.

I turn to specifics. In the case that has been in the media in recent days, the risk assessment is under way. As in all cases, the Scottish Prison Service will not wait until an assessment is completed if it thinks that action is required more quickly. In respect of any prisoner, it would not be appropriate for me to give details of where they are being incarcerated. However, given the understandable public and parliamentary concern around this case, I confirm to members that the prisoner will not be incarcerated in Cornton Vale women's prison. I hope that that provides assurance to the public, not least the victims in this particular case.

Douglas Ross: I appreciate the First Minister's response. However, the rapist is in there; he is in segregation in a women's prison at the moment,

so I am unsure what the First Minister is trying to say. The reality is that this double rapist—this beast—is in a women's prison right now. We think that it is wrong that a rapist is sent to a women's prison, and we believe that a rapist having access to a women's single-sex space is a threat. Given what the First Minister has just said, and given that he is currently in Cornton Vale, does the First Minister believe that it is possible for a rapist to be held in a women's prison, as he is just now, and not be a threat to women?

The First Minister: I think that Douglas Ross should perhaps have listened more carefully to what I said. I have a responsibility, even when standing in this Parliament, to be mindful of issues around the safety and security of everyone. I made some comments in general that I think should give reassurance to the public. In relation to this specific case, I said that the risk assessment is under way but that, as in all cases, the Scottish Prison Service will not wait until an assessment is completed if it thinks that action is required more quickly. The prisoner will not be incarcerated in Cornton Vale women's prison.

In terms of the interim situation and how the situation that I have set out is going to be achieved, I must be mindful of the need to allow the Scottish Prison Service to do its operational job and to do that properly, but I go back to one of the general points that I made, which applies to any prisoner, regardless of whether they are trans, and regardless of whether they are in a male or a female prison. If any prisoner poses or is considered to pose a risk, or is considered to give rise to any concern about sexual offending, that prisoner is segregated from other prisoners, and that applies during any period of risk assessment.

I think that I am being very clear to Parliament, in the light of public concerns, but I am also allowing—having regard to important issues of security and safety—the Scottish Prison Service to undertake its operational responsibilities in relation to an individual case.

Douglas Ross: The First Minister just has to be clear with people. Can she confirm that a double rapist is currently being held in a women's prison? That is the situation.

Let us hear what the former governor of Cornton Vale prison, Rhona Hotchkiss, has said about the situation. She said:

"I am absolutely clear about the fact that they should be in a male prison—you simply cannot have someone like this terrorising women."

She went on to say that it was

"a red line I would not have crossed".

This double rapist decided to change gender only after he was charged by the police. It took the

threat of jail for this criminal to decide to change his gender. That is not a coincidence; it was a conscious decision.

The First Minister is hiding behind the Scottish Prison Service, but it is a Government agency that is accountable to Scottish National Party ministers, so all this really comes down to is what ministers decide. They had the power to prevent this happening, and they still have the power to change this in the first 72 hours, under rule 19(1)(a) of the Scottish Prison Service rules. So, I ask the First Minister, above asking where he currently is: was there any ministerial involvement in the decision to send this rapist to a women's prison? Before that period of 72 hours expires tomorrow, will the First Minister personally intervene and remove this double rapist from Cornton Vale?

The First Minister: I will repeat some of what I have already said. Let me be clear: this prisoner is not going to be incarcerated in Cornton Vale, either short term or long term.

Members: Where is he?

The Presiding Officer: Members, let us hear the First Minister.

The First Minister: It is important to allow the Scottish Prison Service to give effect, operationally, to what I have just said. It is important to stress that. These are operational matters for the Scottish Prison Service. I am standing here and addressing them, and I think that most people who are listening to what I am saying right now will understand fully what I am saying. I am not “hiding behind”—to use Douglas Ross’s phrase—anyone.

I have set out very clearly that I agree with yesterday’s comments by the chief executive of Rape Crisis Scotland, who said:

“I don’t see how it’s possible to have a rapist within a female prison”.

It is, of course, right and proper that individualised risk assessments are done on every prisoner—that is important—but I agree with that statement. I have said that, either in the short term or in the long term, this prisoner is not going to be in Cornton Vale, but it is important to allow the Scottish Prison Service to give effect, operationally, to the decisions that it has taken.

Douglas Ross: I am sorry; I have asked this question three times now. I will take my fourth and final opportunity to ask it again: where is this double rapist at the moment? Is he currently in a women’s prison here in Scotland—yes or no?

I am sorry. We have heard a lot of stuff about the Scottish Prison Service. I have here the rules that the SPS has to work to. Rule 15(1), on the

allocation of prisoners, allows ministers to intervene. Ministers could have intervened before now. Rule 19(1)(a) gives 72 hours for such a decision to be challenged. That period expires tomorrow, and we heard nothing from the First Minister about what she is going to do about that.

We have warned for months that violent criminals just like the sex offender we are discussing today—this absolute beast—would try to exploit loopholes in the law and attack and traumatise women. As we have said all along, the problem is not trans people; the problem is violent offenders. Now, before the Scottish National Party’s Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill has even come into force, rapists are exploiting the current laws. We should not make it any easier for them to attack women.

Nicola Sturgeon seems to reject the idea that the fact that he is currently in Cornton Vale could be a risk to women. I cannot agree with her. I ask the First Minister whether she will go to Cornton Vale and explain personally to the women there, who are sharing their prison with a double rapist, why on earth her Government is allowing them to be in a cell next door?

The First Minister: If Douglas Ross was listening and paying attention to the facts that I am setting out, he would know what I am saying.

First, I am saying that the Scottish Prison Service is in the process of giving effect to the decision that it has taken not to incarcerate that prisoner in Cornton Vale. It is my expectation that, before the 72-hour period that Douglas Ross has referred to expires, that prisoner will not be in Cornton Vale prison. I think that, for most reasonable people, that would be a very clear explanation of the situation.

A very small number of trans women are currently in prison custody, and many of them are, in fact, in male prisons. There is no automatic right for any trans woman to serve their sentence in a female prison. That is subject to robust risk assessment, which is right and proper.

To be fair to Douglas Ross, he made an important point. When we have these exchanges, we must always be careful that we do not, even inadvertently, suggest that trans women somehow pose an inherent threat to women. Predatory men, as has always been the case, are the risk to women. However, as with any group in society, a small number of trans people will offend. Where that relates to sexual offending, public concern is understandable. That is why the systems that the Scottish Prison Service already has in place are robust and why, as I am setting out here, those systems will lead to the right outcome in this individual case.

Accident and Emergency (Waiting Times)

2. **Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab):** Tomorrow marks Holocaust memorial day, when we remember the 6 million Jews and other victims who lost their lives to Nazi persecution and also remember the victims of genocide in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur. We see division in politics every day, but today we stand shoulder to shoulder in the face of antisemitism and all other forms of prejudice and hate. We unite to say, "Never again," but we cannot be complacent. We still have a long way to go to create a more equal and more peaceful world.

Last week, one in three people waited for longer than the four-hour standard in accident and emergency. There is a continuing crisis in Scotland's accident and emergency departments, which is caused by decisions made by the Government over the past 15 years. Patients are waiting longer than ever before for care, and we know that long waits cost lives. Will the First Minister tell us how many people waited for more than 24 hours in A and E in the past year?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): First, I associate myself with Anas Sarwar's comments about Holocaust memorial day. This week, we remember all victims of genocide. That is important, but it is also important on this occasion to rededicate ourselves to the fight against prejudice, hatred and intolerance. I know that we are all united in that endeavour.

Anas Sarwar asked for a specific figure. I suspect that he is about to give that to me but, if he does not, I will provide it to him later.

The situation in our accident and emergency departments remains very acute. There is significant pressure on the national health service in general and on emergency care in particular. However, we are seeing an improving situation at this stage—for example, since the beginning of January, waits of more than eight hours and more than 12 hours have each fallen by about 40 per cent.

There is still work to do, and we are supporting the NHS in that work, but we hope that the severity of the winter crisis is starting to abate and we hope to see further improvements in the weeks to come.

Anas Sarwar: The First Minister is right—I do know the number and she should know it, too, because it impacts people across this country every single day. The answer that she was looking for is that 6,362 people waited for more than 24 hours in A and E last year. In 2019, the number was 48. Let me repeat that: 48 people waited for more than 24 hours in 2019. In 2022, that number increased to 6,362, and some waited even longer—1,356 people waited for more than 36

hours in A and E, and 390 people waited for more than 48 hours. That is two whole days waiting in A and E.

This is the worst it has ever been. Staff are burned out, patients' lives are at risk and A and E doctors are telling us that 36 people could die because of long waits this week alone. What is the First Minister doing right now to prevent such unnecessary deaths this week, next week and in future weeks, too?

The First Minister: I have set out in recent weeks the actions that we are taking—the investment in the winter plan and in additional interim care beds, for example, and other support for the national health service. Long waits, whether they are in accident and emergency units or in any other part of the NHS, are unacceptable, and they have consequences, which is why we work so hard to reduce and eliminate long waits in the NHS.

Of course, there is always something missing from Anas Sarwar's questions—important though those questions are—when he compares figures from 2018 with figures now, and that is the global pandemic that we have been dealing with in the intervening period. That said, it remains the priority to tackle waits in our national health service, which is why we are cautiously optimistic, although not complacent, about the improvements that we are seeing in accident and emergency units. The latest weekly figures, for example, show that four-hour performance is up by 6.7 points on the previous week and, as I said, we are starting to see significant declines in the percentages and the numbers of people who are waiting for more than eight hours and more than 12 hours.

However, there is still a lot of work to do to support staff. Of course, one of the things that we have done here in Scotland but which has not been replicated in England or in Wales, where there is a Labour Government, is to offer staff the best possible pay increase that we can—on average, it is 7.5 per cent here in Scotland, as compared with 4.5 per cent where Labour is in government in Wales.

Anas Sarwar: From listening to the First Minister's response, I can understand the anger of staff and patients. This is what one nurse told the *Daily Record* this week:

"Patients are not angry at the NHS but with the Scottish Government. The First Minister and the Cabinet Secretary need to speak to these patients. The Scottish Government do not see these patients as human beings, as someone's mum or dad."

This is about human life—about each and every single one of the SNP MSPs' constituents whose lives are at risk every single day.

It is not good enough for the First Minister to keep making excuses or to talk about Covid, because demand on A and E is actually down by nearly 120,000 people compared with 2019. Fewer people are using A and E, but waiting times are still longer than they have ever been. Scotland's NHS is at breaking point, and things are only getting worse on Nicola Sturgeon's watch. We have the longest-ever waits at A and E; patients waiting hours in ambulances to even get into A and E; 776,000 people—one in seven Scots—on an NHS waiting list; and record-breaking delayed discharges.

Our NHS, our patients and our staff deserve so much better than that. Why should people across Scotland continue to accept the unacceptable from the SNP Government?

The First Minister: First, every single patient who is seen in our national health service is a human being and, frankly, I think that it demeans Anas Sarwar's argument to suggest that any of us does not think that that is the case. [*Interruption.*] Anas Sarwar is responsible for what he says in the chamber; nobody else is responsible for what he says in the chamber.

My second point is that Anas Sarwar asked me in his previous question what action the Government is taking, and he then pointed to reduced demand for accident and emergency services, which is actually because of the action that is being taken. The Scottish Ambulance Service sees and treats, which means that many more patients now get seen and treated without ever having to go to a hospital. NHS 24 is working to reduce attendances at and admissions to hospital. That is an example of the actions that we are taking having an impact.

Lastly, I take responsibility, as does the health secretary, for NHS Scotland every single day of the week. However, Anas Sarwar's argument seems to be that this is all, somehow, uniquely down to the SNP. I know that he does not like comparisons but, if he is going to make that argument, I am afraid that they are inevitable. If it is all down to the SNP, why, in the latest full month for which we have statistics, is A and E performance in Scotland 6.2 percentage points better than performance in Wales, where Labour is in government?

The fact of the matter is that pressure on the health service is intense in Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland; we are dealing with that pressure; and in many respects—

The Presiding Officer: Briefly, First Minister.

The First Minister: —those who work so hard across our NHS in Scotland are doing a better job than we find in many other parts of the United Kingdom.

Homelessness (People with No Recourse to Public Funds)

3. Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to reports that dozens of people living in Scotland with no recourse to public funds are being made homeless and forced to sleep rough on the streets or in cars. (S6F-01743)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Preventing people who are facing destitution from accessing support when they need it most is unacceptable—and, I think, shocking. It is disturbing in the extreme that the United Kingdom Government's policy of no recourse to public funds prevents local and national Government from providing support to people and remains the biggest barrier to eradicating rough sleeping in Scotland.

Immigration and the policy of no recourse to public funds are entirely reserved matters. We have repeatedly raised the devastating impact of those policies. We will continue to work with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to improve access to support and services for people who are subject to those policies, as far as is possible within devolved powers.

Maggie Chapman: No one should be made homeless, be forced into destitution or have their human rights infringed, regardless of their immigration status. The UK's immigration system—including the NRPf policy in particular—prevents people from accessing essential safety and lifeline services in times of need. Lack of provision and support risks leaving some people open to modern slavery and exploitation.

In Scotland, the ending destitution together strategy seeks to ensure that those who have no recourse to public funds are protected as far as is possible within devolved powers. What has been done to ensure that as much support as possible is available and that people make use of that support? How is information, including information about nationalities, being collected on how many people with no recourse are homeless or at risk of being homeless?

The First Minister: I thank Maggie Chapman for raising those issues. Information on the number of people who are at risk of homelessness will be collated via on-going engagement with the third sector and local authorities.

As I said in my previous answer, we will continue to do all that we can within devolved powers, including funding support and advice services—for example, we have provided more than £900,000 since 2020 to ensure the operation in Edinburgh and Glasgow of winter support that is open to everyone. In addition, COSLA has

produced guidance to ensure that people who are subject to the policy of no recourse to public funds are supported to access services that are available to them. Updated guidance will be published later this year. However, it is critical that the UK Government changes the policy of no recourse to public funds, so that we can act to support everyone in Scotland at times of crisis, regardless of their immigration status.

Levelling Up Fund (Allocations in Scotland)

4. John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to the second round of the United Kingdom Government's levelling up fund allocations in Scotland. (S6F-01745)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): We fundamentally disagree with the Westminster Government's making decisions in devolved areas. Of course, any additional funding is welcome, but that should be devolved through the Barnett formula, just as we were promised that the European Union funding would be devolved after Brexit, to allow Scottish ministers and councils to make decisions about its use.

The fund overlooks Scotland's distinct economic needs, and the latest awards show that many remote, rural and sparsely populated regions are being ignored. I am further disappointed that UK ministers decided, after bids had been submitted, to consider which local authorities had received funding in the first round—meaning that councils in Scotland wasted money, time and effort in bidding for funds that they were no longer eligible for.

The evidence is clear: the so-called levelling up approach means that Scotland is losing out.

John Mason: It seems that less well-off areas such as Glasgow have lost out in round 2 and were, possibly, misled by the UK Government as to the bidding process. Does the First Minister share my opinion that a levelling up fund should target poorer areas? Surely, funding decisions have to be based on either levelling up or geographical spread. It cannot be both.

The First Minister: John Mason is absolutely right. I share his concern that Glasgow and other council areas in Scotland that have high levels of deprivation have lost out.

Of course, if the Scottish Government had been given control of that funding, which would have been the correct and sensible course of action, we would not have taken the competitive dash for cash approach favoured by the UK Government. The UK Government can still choose to devolve funding to Scotland for our share of the remaining levelling up funding, and we would be happy to discuss that with it.

That is not just our view. The Tory mayor of the West Midlands described this as another example of

“Whitehall's bidding and begging bowl culture”.

He said that he

“cannot understand why the levelling up fund money was not devolved for local decision makers to decide on what's best for their areas.”

I completely agree.

Unethical and Illegal Dog Breeding

5. Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): To ask the First Minister what steps are being taken to tackle unethical and illegal dog breeding, in light of recent reports of high-value extreme breeding programmes operating in Scotland. (S6F-01753)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The recent BBC programmes on illegal and unethical dog breeding paint an alarming picture. The Scottish Government is actively working with a number of Government and key stakeholder organisations, including the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and Police Scotland, to disrupt the activities of those involved in the unlicensed puppy trade.

New animal licensing regulations were introduced in 2021, covering the breeding and selling of dogs, to tackle the growing issues linked to puppy farming. We intend to consult on the potential licensing of other activities, including canine fertility clinics, later this year.

Furthermore, several puppy campaigns have been run over the past few years to highlight the cruelty of the trade, raise public awareness and provide advice on how to buy a puppy safely.

Jamie Greene: Anyone who saw the episode of the BBC's “Disclosure”, which I recommend to the chamber, will be as horrified, disgusted and angry about the issue as I am. It is a multimillion-pound pet industry that has been fuelled by consumer demand for designer dogs. It is being run by organised crime and is a pet industry based on nothing but greed. I am afraid to say that those dogs are now more valuable to criminals than drugs. The consequences are often tragic, involving the loss of life. It is happening right here, right now, in Scotland.

Why are there so few prosecutions for illegal dog breeding here in Scotland, relative to the number of incidents reported?

Secondly, what specific legislation is the Scottish Government willing to introduce to crack down on illegal and unethical breeding and selling? That includes closing any loopholes on co-ownership of dogs.

Finally, will the whole Parliament now send the strongest possible message to those involved in this disgusting trade to say that we will not put up with their cruelty any more and that, if they break the law, they will pay a heavy price for it?

The First Minister: I absolutely agree with Jamie Greene. He is right to bring these issues to the chamber. This behaviour is despicable, illegal and unethical, and people who engage in it should expect to face the full force of the law.

Jamie Greene asked me about numbers of prosecutions. As he understands, prosecution is not a matter for ministers. Decisions about prosecution are matters for the police and the prosecution authorities. I will ask law officers to write to him if there is further information that they can helpfully provide.

I indicated in my previous answer that, having introduced regulations in 2021, we intend to consult on the potential licensing of other activities later this year. Everyone across Parliament will have the opportunity to contribute to that consultation.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I welcome that exchange and, further to that, I welcome the Government's support for my welfare of dogs bill, which will shortly be introduced. If passed, the bill will require prospective dog owners to consider rigorously and fully all aspects of the welfare of the puppy, including the breeding, before buying.

Does the First Minister therefore agree that if that leads to educated demand, the supply of cruelly-bred puppies will reduce, which will cut off the vast profits—already referred to—that go to criminals who care nothing for the welfare of the puppies, seeing them only as fashionable, marketable commodities?

The First Minister: Yes, I very much agree, and that point is very well made. We have got to consider the issues of supply and demand and the interrelationship between them. I very much welcome any and all proposals that support animal welfare, and I take the opportunity to applaud Christine Grahame for all her hard work over a long period to introduce the legislation that she refers to. I look forward to the bill's imminent introduction, which I understand will raise much-needed awareness about the responsibility of owning a dog. I am sure that the bill will have strong support from all parties right across the chamber.

Human Papillomavirus Vaccine

6. **Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister what steps the Scottish Government is taking to increase uptake of the HPV vaccine, in light of warnings from Jo's

Cervical Cancer Trust that girls in the most deprived areas of Scotland are missing out. (S6F-01754)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Scotland has the highest uptake rates for the human papillomavirus vaccine across the four nations of the United Kingdom, but we want to go further and increase uptake in particular in the most deprived areas. Therefore, from 1 January this year, a simplified one-dose schedule was introduced for all eligible girls aged up to their 25th birthday. We anticipate that that approach will further increase uptake.

One-dose HPV vaccine uptake is currently 91.5 per cent for girls in secondary 4 and 88.4 per cent for girls in the most deprived areas. We have provided more than £400,000 to Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust to support its campaign work on screening benefits. My officials will also be happy to work with the trust, along with Public Health Scotland and health boards, to understand how we can maximise uptake rates in areas of deprivation.

The creation of a women's health champion provides a further opportunity for such issues to be promoted and addressed. I am delighted to announce today the appointment of Professor Anna Glasier as Scotland's first women's health champion. Professor Glasier's work will be key to driving improvement in women's health and helping to address the inequalities that have persisted in that area for far too long.

Jackie Baillie: I welcome the First Minister's announcement. However, it has come 18 months later than was originally intended.

The World Health Organization's target for fully vaccinating girls against HPV is 90 per cent, but the latest figures for Scotland, which are for last year, show that only 77 per cent of girls in the most deprived areas were fully vaccinated. The WHO also recommends that 70 per cent of women be screened, but women from the most deprived areas are less likely to take part in screening programmes, with uptake there reaching only 63 per cent.

We have the tools to end cervical cancer in Scotland, but the Scottish Government is not using them. Vaccination rates are too low and the roll-out of self-sampling is too slow. Women with abnormal smear tests face waits of a year for colposcopy appointments, and there continue to be inequalities for women in the poorest communities. Will the First Minister commit to addressing those issues as a matter of urgency? Will she set out a clear plan in the next month so that cervical cancer can be eliminated in Scotland?

The First Minister: We already have a women's health plan that addresses those and many other issues—in fact, I think that Scotland was the first part of the UK to have such a plan. Professor Glasier will now have the key task of driving it forward.

Those issues are really important, but I do not think that it is the case that the Scottish Government is not using all its levers. As I said earlier, Scotland has the highest uptake rates for the HPV vaccine across all the four UK nations. However, we have recognised that we need to do more and we are doing so through, for example, the introduction of the simplified one-dose schedule. We are seeing the benefits of that approach. Since the vaccination of girls started in 2008, the number of cases with pre-cancerous cells identified in that population at cervical screening has reduced by almost 90 per cent in comparison with rates in women who were not vaccinated. We will continue to take those important steps to improve the health of girls and women in that respect and indeed in all others.

The Presiding Officer: We move to general and constituency supplementary questions.

Prepayment Meters (PayPoint Facilities)

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): I draw the attention of the First Minister to the experience of a constituent of mine, who has informed me that they were told to make an in-store purchase ahead of using a PayPoint facility to top up their energy meter. PayPoint has confirmed to me that that should never happen, and it has contacted the business in question. Does the First Minister agree that, although the vast majority of PayPoint vendors are professional and provide an important service, where unacceptable practices exist, such as the one that I have just highlighted, they should be reported swiftly and acted upon? Does she also agree that my constituent's experience highlights yet again the barriers and vulnerabilities that many people who use prepayment meters face?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I very much agree with that. I echo Bob Doris's concerns and what he has said in response to them.

I am aware of similar issues, and I urge people to raise their concerns with advice agencies and their energy providers to get the necessary advice and support. However, because such issues relate to a reserved matter it is incumbent on the United Kingdom Government to take further action on prepayment meters. Forcing people on to those meters, in particular for small amounts of debt during winter, makes matters worse for people—not better—and is more likely to increase debt and leave people unable to heat their homes. I urge the UK Government to respond to that concern

and to listen to the many calls to ban energy companies from being able to force people on to the use of prepayment meters.

Swimming Pool Closures (Falkirk Council)

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): Falkirk Council is considering closing four school swimming pools and one public pool in order to make ends meet. I have had numerous emails about that; it boils down to council funding cuts from the Scottish Government. Does the First Minister agree that closing swimming pools is a retrograde step? What does she intend to do about it?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Council budgets are not being cut: the draft budget for this year proposes a £570 million increase in the local government settlement. Of course, had the Tories had their way and we had seen tax cuts for the very richest in our society, council budgets would have had to be cut. Thankfully, we did not follow Conservative advice in that regard.

We are still in the budget process, so I make an offer to the member, and indeed to all members on the Tory benches. We work within what is effectively a fixed budget, and where we can increase revenue, we are doing so by asking those who earn the most to pay a little bit more to help public services. However, if the Tories in Scotland want to see more money for councils or for anybody else—that is contrary to their actions south of the border, of course—they should tell us from where in the draft budget we should take that money. We are happy to have a conversation about that.

Asylum (Placement of Unaccompanied Children)

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): The First Minister may recall that, before Christmas, I put to her a question regarding councils placing unaccompanied children who are seeking asylum in hotels. Since then, there have been reports that at least 200 children are missing or have been abducted from six Home Office hotels in England. I know that the First Minister will share my horror at that, as—I am sure—will members in the chamber.

Regarding the safety of unaccompanied children in Scotland, can she give an assurance that that is being delivered here, regardless of which authority is providing their accommodation?

Is she aware of any instances occurring in Scotland that are similar to those that have been reported in England? Can she provide an update on what steps the Government is taking to ensure that unaccompanied children are being moved from hotels into secure accommodation?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I recall the question that was asked before Christmas. I will write to the member with any update that I can give him on actions that are being taken by councils in Scotland, supported where necessary and appropriate by the Scottish Government, to address those very real concerns. I will include any information that councils have about unaccompanied children in Scotland.

In relation to the general issue, I think that everybody must have been deeply shocked to hear this week the revelation that 200 children have gone missing when they should have been effectively in the care of the Home Office. What is perhaps even more shocking is how little attention seems to have been paid to that. If a child in this country goes missing, there is rightly a lot of attention paid, and that should be no different in the case of these unaccompanied children.

While those children are here, they are our responsibility, and we should care for them and love them and ensure that they are looked after. I will respond to Paul Sweeney's question in relation to local authorities in Scotland, but I hope that all members, on all sides of the chamber, can unite today to demand for everybody, but in particular for children, much more humanity in the United Kingdom Government's approach to immigration and asylum.

Men's Sheds (Funding)

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): Men's sheds in communities across Scotland provide a place for men to meet, socialise and pursue hobbies, and it is increasingly recognised that they make a tangible difference in tackling isolation, loneliness and mental ill health. That is why the men's shed movement commands strong cross-party support across the chamber, and why more than 40 MSPs recently wrote to the Deputy First Minister to express concerns about proposed funding cuts.

Will the First Minister guarantee that her Government will protect the core and development funding for the Scottish Men's Sheds Association in order to allow that invaluable public health movement to be maintained and expanded?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The men's shed movement does fantastic work—I associate myself with Liam McArthur's comments about the work that it does and the impact that it has.

My understanding is that there have been discussions with the Government and an offer of financial support has been made for the next financial year. I will ask the minister concerned to write to the member with more detail and, indeed, to make that known to Parliament more generally.

Teacher Numbers

Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I am concerned about the reports of potential reductions in teacher numbers, especially with regard to Glasgow. Can the First Minister reveal what action the Scottish Government can take to protect teacher numbers?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The Government will act to protect teacher numbers. This Government has a commitment to increase teacher numbers and councils are being given additional funding specifically to deliver that. It would not be acceptable to me or the Scottish Government to see teacher numbers fall. Therefore, I can confirm that the Government intends to take steps to ensure that the funding that we are providing to councils to maintain increased numbers of teachers actually delivers that outcome, and the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills will set out more details to Parliament in the coming days.

A96 (Dualling)

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): In a spate of crashes on the A96, two weeks ago, two people were seriously injured; last week, three people were hospitalised; and just yesterday, two more were hospitalised. A poll run by *The Press and Journal* showed 93 per cent of respondents demanding that the road be dualled and, at the weekend, Gillian Martin wrote persuasively:

"we must dual the A96 for safety, equity and environmental reasons".

However, it is reported that no final decision on dualling has been made, and that one might not be made for years. How many more accidents and injuries will it take before the First Minister's Government listens to the people of the north-east, stops the delaying tactics and delivers on its decade-old promise to dual that appalling road?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): First, my thoughts go to everyone who sustains injuries on our roads, and, indeed, anyone who is bereaved through accidents on our roads.

The Scottish Government's commitments in terms of dualling and upgrading the A96 stand. Of course, there are assessments and reviews—not least environmental ones—under way, as is right and proper, and the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport will keep Parliament updated as appropriate.

Freeports

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): The west of Scotland is our country's industrial heartland, with a heavy concentration in the Glasgow city region, which has 57 per cent of the worst 15 per cent of

areas on the Scottish index of multiple deprivation, yet an excellent freeport bid—the Clyde green freeport bid—was not supported by the Government, even though it fully met the criteria in tackling deprivation and boosting manufacturing.

It is important to note that eight local authorities supported the bid. That was a central requirement for submission, and it was not easy to pull together. However, the successful bids were in the east, with none being in the west.

Is the First Minister satisfied with that? How would she justify those positions? Can she outline what the plan is to compensate Glasgow, the wider city region and the Clyde communities that were involved in the bid?

I do not know why the bid was rejected. However, in the interests of full transparency, I think that we need to see the reasons why there was no designation of a freeport in the west of Scotland. I do not know the full implications of a freeport designation but, as a member for Glasgow, I am concerned about the fact that there is no freeport in the west of Scotland.

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): A number of high-quality bids were submitted, including the one that Pauline McNeill refers to. They were assessed in line with the published criteria, and there was a joint decision-making process between the Scottish Government and the UK Government, with the successful bidders being announced two weeks ago.

I understand the disappointment on the part of the bids that were not successful. It does not mean that those bids were not of a high quality, but successful bids had to be selected.

The Scottish Government is committed to continued work with unsuccessful bidders and the regions that were part of the bid to see what we can do to support them to deliver on their ambitions and objectives for the future.

Holocaust Memorial Day

Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP): Tomorrow, 27 January, is Holocaust memorial day, which marks the anniversary of the liberation, 78 years ago, of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the largest Nazi death camp. Does the First Minister support the great work that is done by the Holocaust Educational Trust, our schools and others in teaching successive generations of our children about the atrocities that saw millions of people murdered and slaughtered, including 6 million Jews and many other minorities? Does she agree that that educational work is essential, so that we never forget the lesson that atrocities and oppression must be fought, wheresoever they occur?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I associate myself whole-heartedly with Fergus Ewing's comments on Holocaust memorial day. Indeed, throughout the year, I am very proud that the Scottish Government strongly supports the excellent work of the Holocaust Educational Trust to enable young people across Scotland to continue to learn from the atrocities of the Holocaust as we challenge the oppressions of the present.

I know that some members will have had the privilege this week of hearing directly from the Holocaust Educational Trust's young ambassadors about the impact of Holocaust education on their lives. That is a privilege that I have had in previous years. Indeed, I had the opportunity a few years ago to visit Auschwitz with the trust. That was one of the most profoundly moving experiences of my life.

I think that we all agree that education has a key role to play in building a society that actively challenges discrimination, hate, intolerance and prejudice in all its forms and advances equality. We should do that all year round. However, Holocaust memorial day gives us the opportunity every year to rededicate ourselves to that very important responsibility.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes First Minister's questions. The next item of business is a members' business debate in the name of Fergus Ewing. There will now be a short suspension to allow those who are leaving the chamber and the public gallery to do so before that debate begins.

12:46

Meeting suspended.

12:48

On resuming—

Holocaust Memorial Day 2023

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): I ask those who are leaving the public gallery to do so as quickly and quietly as possible, please.

The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-07477, in the name of Fergus Ewing, on Holocaust memorial day 2023. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises what it sees as the importance of continuing to impart the lessons of the Holocaust to each generation; considers that the Holocaust was the systematic attempt by a genocidal regime in Europe to murder all Jewish people on the continent between the years 1941 and 1945, with six million men, women and children tragically losing their lives; notes that the annual Holocaust Memorial Day will be held on 27 January 2023, and that the chosen theme for this year's event is "ordinary people"; recognises that this particular theme has been chosen to highlight the ordinary people who were involved in all elements of, not just the Holocaust, but later genocides including in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur; acknowledges that, to better understand ordinary people, the theme has been subdivided into five categories: perpetrators, bystanders, rescuers, witnesses and crucially, victims; further acknowledges that, according to the theme, particular groups of people do not always belong to just one of the categories, with railway workers cited as an example where some in this job at the time of the Holocaust are considered as perpetrators, for driving trains to concentration camps, and others as rescuers, for hiding Jewish people; understands that the theme can be widened to include ordinary locations and sites, including schools and hospitals, as such buildings can be used to perpetrate genocide; notes that the theme also highlights that there are extraordinary individuals in all genocides, including those who were part of what it considers remarkable efforts to rescue and save the lives of people targeted by murderous regimes, and believes that underpinning the theme is the powerful narrative that everyone living today is an ordinary person, who is able to be extraordinary in their actions through making the choice to challenge prejudice, stand up against hatred, and speak out against identity-based persecution.

12:48

Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP): The theme of Holocaust memorial day this year is "Ordinary People". We know, of course, that Hitler and his henchmen—Himmler, Heydrich, Eichmann and others—were the very personification of evil. However, leaders need followers, and their leadership succeeded in visiting the horrors of the Holocaust only because of the complicity of their followers. Sadly, their followers were ordinary people.

It was ordinary people who facilitated the chilling final solution devised at the Wannsee conference, with its despicable memorial, to which Mr Carlaw referred in his remarks last year. It was ordinary people who stood by and did nothing in the early years of the Nazi regime, from Kristallnacht right through to Auschwitz, Belsen, Sobibor and the rest. It is the harsh and incontrovertible truth that the killing of 6 million people took place because ordinary people permitted it, perpetrated it or did not prevent it.

However, we also remember the ordinary people who were the rescuers: the famous, such as Oskar Schindler and Raoul Wallenberg, through to the anonymous—the thousands of ordinary people in Poland who lived in the areas surrounding the Auschwitz camps and helped to harbour, and make good the escape of, the very few people who were fortunate enough to get out of that ghastly place. Those ordinary people put their own lives at risk by harbouring prisoners and helping them to make their escape to liberty.

We remember, too, the genocides that have taken place since the second world war in Cambodia, Bosnia, Rwanda and, sadly, many other places throughout the world. Each genocide starts with the abandonment and disregard of human rights, with people being punished for who they are or for what their identity is. People are punished for being Jewish, or disabled, or Sinti, or Roma, or gay. It starts in that way, but it ends up in the gas chambers because ordinary people have allowed or enabled it or, in fact, helped to carry it out.

I want to use my remarks today to remember one person in Scotland—one rescuer who, I believe, made an extraordinary contribution that has not yet been sufficiently recognised. They made a contribution to the cause of humanity and human rights through helping to secure the release of prisoners from hideous Russian gulags—Russian prison camps. That person is my old boss, Leslie Wolfson.

In the days of Solzhenitsyn, the Russian regime detained many people simply for the crime of expressing their views—the so-called prisoners of conscience. They were sentenced to many years in the labour camps, where many of them died. In the late 1970s into the 1980s, Leslie Wolfson decided to use his considerable expertise as a lawyer and successful businessman to help to extract those prisoners from Russia. He set himself a task that, at the time, looked utterly impossible or even absurd.

After a while of working in a committee to try to secure the release of the prisoners—a committee that Leslie described as a hurdle, not a help—he simply decided to do it himself and to act on his own. His method was unique. He sought to hire

lawyers in Russia to act in the defence of those who were incarcerated or who faced incarceration. That was much easier said than put into practice. He made numerous visits to Moscow, some of which were almost entirely useless.

Many a meeting took place in which Leslie—who was not a drinker, Presiding Officer—was forced to match, shot by shot, the vodka that was consumed by his putative legal helpers. Never in the history of human rights campaigning has so much vodka been consumed with so little enthusiasm by a Glasgow solicitor. However, he persevered. He invited 20 Russian lawyers to visit his Glasgow home. He established many relationships with lawyers who could help. He hired them, met them, cajoled them and persuaded them. Through Sir Fitzroy Maclean, he made contact with other lawyers, perhaps of more influence.

In the first case that he took on, he succeeded in enabling a carpenter from the Caspian area called Pinhas Pinhasov to be freed several years early by helping to secure a remission of his sentence from five years to two. Pinhasov's so-called crime had been allegedly overcharging for his services as a carpenter.

Leslie was eventually advised that Mr Pinhasov had been freed and seen in Moscow, but Israeli authorities in the United Kingdom were a bit sceptical about that, so Leslie phoned the solicitor who had been dealing with the case—a lawyer in Russia. In that call, the two of them tried to communicate in various languages, because Leslie had no Russian and his counterpart has no English. They tried French, which did not work, nor did Italian. Eventually, they found that they had a little German in common, and Leslie then heard the words uttered—which, he said, remained with him for the rest of his life—“Alles gut mit Pinhasov”. He and his wife, Alma, later met Pinhas in Israel, where he had been reunited with his family.

Leslie's success bred success, and he was then showered with cases, which he doggedly pursued. He also helped to set up an annual legal seminar in Leningrad, attended Burns suppers in Moscow and joined associations with Russian lawyers and the International Bar Association. Although it was often difficult to discern the precise reason for the release of prisoners whose cases he took up, his aim was accomplished, which is quite remarkable. He was instrumental in securing the release of prisoners, who regained their liberty as a result.

Leslie also worked with my mother when she was a member of the European Parliament. Together, they raised the case of Wolf Zalmanson, who had been imprisoned for seven years in a labour camp. She raised a case in the European Parliament and got children from Elgin academy to

write letters to Mr Zalmanson. Eventually, she and Leslie succeeded, and they met Wolf Zalmanson in Tel Aviv. She said that it was the happiest meeting of her life. She recounted a story told by Wolf about when he was in the Russian prison camp and was learning Hebrew. The prison guard said to him, “Why are you bothering learning Hebrew? You are stuck here in the camp in Russia; you are not getting out.” He said, “Well, when I go to heaven, I want to be able to converse with Jacob and Isaiah.” The prison guard said, “What about if you go to hell?”, and Wolf said, “I already speak Russian.”

Winnie is still with us at the age of 93. Leslie, sadly, is no longer with us, but his wife, Alma, might be watching today. Leslie was a man of indomitable optimism, and he was hugely warm, intelligent and civilised. Above all, he was thraven and determined to take on a seemingly impossible task. It was his extraordinary determination and his unique idea, carried through by him in person, that helped many people to escape tyranny and retain their liberty.

The theme this year is “Ordinary People”, including rescuers who did extraordinary things. Leslie Wolfson was a leading member of the Jewish community in Scotland—a community that is so greatly valued and that has achieved so very much. I hope that I have, in this speech today, done justice to an extraordinary man whose work deserves to be remembered and respected. [Applause.]

12:58

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife)
(Con): I am very pleased to speak in support of this important motion, and I thank Fergus Ewing for bringing the debate to the chamber today.

As the motion quite rightly says, it is vital that we continue to impart the lessons of the Holocaust to each and every future generation. We know that more than 6 million individuals were annihilated. The true horrors of the Holocaust, along with subsequent genocides and persecutions across the world, must never be erased from the public psyche.

This year's Holocaust memorial day theme—“Ordinary People”—is a huge opportunity, as it recognises the ordinary day-to-day people who became involved in many facets of the Holocaust. That is in addition to the later, well-documented genocides that happened in Cambodia, Rwanda, Darfur and Bosnia.

As the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust explains, genocide is facilitated by ordinary people. The individuals who are persecuted, oppressed and murdered in genocides often are not persecuted because of crimes that they have committed; it is

because they are ordinary people who belong to a particular group.

As we approach Holocaust memorial day tomorrow, I feel that it is important to mention an immensely important part of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller history. Every June, as part of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller history month, the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust remembers and commemorates the richness that Gypsy and Traveller communities bring to our everyday lives through their many and varied academic and artistic achievements.

The Holocaust Memorial Day Trust reminds us that, throughout the truly horrendous and hideous circumstances during the 1930s and 1940s, the Jewish people were, tragically, not the only ones to be under the inhumane sway of the Nazi regime. For more than a decade from about 1935, European Roma and Sinti people, who have often been labelled as “Gypsies” historically, were targeted for annihilation by the Nazi regime.

Last week, I was delighted to host in Parliament a group of young Gypsy Travellers, along with their parents, their grandparents and charity workers. They visited Parliament as part of a project in my region for young Gypsy Travellers who are not attending high school. Through the project, they get support with skills and qualifications that can help them through their lives. I was deeply inspired by the youngsters, who, to a person, were immensely enthusiastic and possessed a healthy appetite for learning. During a question session with them, they talked about how they feel persecuted even today. We also touched on the horrors of the Holocaust, which affected previous generations of Travellers in the 1930s and 1940s.

The reason why I mention that is that it is too easy for society to put labels on particular groups. The reality is that these are all individuals with the right to learn, the right to be heard and the right to survive. Indeed, they are ordinary people whose efforts deserve and require acknowledgement.

It is with that in mind that we should commit to ensuring equality of opportunity for every one of us in our communities. We should talk about understanding particularly marginalised groups. We should also never forget the horrors that many groups have had to endure to get to where they are today.

13:02

Paul O’Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): I begin by thanking Fergus Ewing for bringing this important debate to the chamber as we mark Holocaust memorial day, which will be observed around the world tomorrow, 78 years since the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau.

We remember the 6 million Jews who were murdered by the Nazis, alongside millions of others who were killed by Nazi persecution—Roma and Sinti people, disabled people, LGBT people, black people and political opponents of the regime—and we rededicate ourselves to saying, “Never again”. Yet, all too painfully, we know that, in the years since the Holocaust, genocide has happened again—in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur—and that, in our world today, identity-based persecution continues against Yazidi people, Rohingya Muslims and Uyghur Muslims.

As we have heard, the theme of this year’s memorial day, which is provided by the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, is “Ordinary People”. Genocide is facilitated by ordinary people: people who turn a blind eye, believe propaganda or join murderous regimes. Genocide is perpetrated against ordinary people: people who were neighbours, colleagues and friends. Identity-based persecution can also be challenged by ordinary people: those who stand up and speak out, or those with great courage who hide and save people in the darkest of times. Thus the ordinary can become extraordinary.

Colleagues will know that I come from East Renfrewshire and have represented communities there for more than a decade. As it is home to Scotland’s largest Jewish population, I have had the honour over many years of meeting Holocaust survivors and hearing their testimony at first hand. What always strikes me is the normality of people’s lives before they were shattered by the Nazis coming to power or invading their homeland. They lived lives that we would recognise, had dreams and ambitions that we would recognise, and loved and were loved in a way that we would all recognise, yet all that basic humanity was torn apart as the Nazis dehumanised and othered them.

Today, I want to take a moment to speak about Henry and Ingrid Wuga. Henry and his late wife, Ingrid, survived the Holocaust by escaping Germany as teenagers. They had watched their ordinary lives being smashed on Kristallnacht and were abused at school and in the streets. They saw at first hand the increasing violence and brutality of the Nazis under the Nuremberg laws.

Their parents made the courageous decision to send them to Britain on the Kindertransport—ordinary parents going to extraordinary lengths to save their children. They were sponsored by people in the UK and, eventually, here in Scotland, where they would come to settle, meet each other, marry and raise a family. They were sponsored by ordinary people in this country who decided to open their homes and their hearts to people in the most desperate of circumstances—something that we can all recognise from current events.

Henry and Ingrid dedicated years of their lives in this country to educating young people about the Holocaust through the Holocaust Educational Trust. In their gentle and encouraging way, they helped young people to see the Holocaust as relevant to them, their lives and their everyday experience. We owe a debt of gratitude to them and to other survivors for sharing their testimony.

As time passes, and the living survivor memory declines, it falls to each of us to tell their stories. We, ordinary people, must tell the story, call out hatred and light the darkness. We do not do that alone; we stand together with amazing organisations such as the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, the Holocaust Educational Trust, the Anne Frank Trust, the Gathering the Voices project and many more custodians of Holocaust remembrance.

Kemal Pervanic, a survivor of the Bosnian genocide, whom I have heard speak, said:

“People may think that they have nothing to do with my story. But what happened to me, could happen to them—to people like yourself. It may sound too hard to believe but this doesn’t happen to strangers who live far away. I’m just an ordinary person. These terrible things can happen to people like us.”

Let us all remember the ordinary people who were cruelly murdered in the Holocaust and subsequent genocides, and let us all look inside ourselves to find the ability to make the ordinary extraordinary.

13:07

Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): I thank Fergus Ewing for today’s debate and his touching speech. The other speeches have been fantastic, too. Holocaust memorial day is a time to remember the millions of people who were murdered during the Holocaust under Nazi persecution.

Our world is scarred by genocide and we seek to learn the lessons of the past, recognising that genocide does not just take place on its own; it is a steady process that begins with discrimination, racism and hatred that grow and spread when left unchecked. Therefore, it is the responsibility of ordinary people—every individual—to challenge discrimination on their own doorsteps. That takes courage and is easier said than done on many occasions, but it is not good enough just to talk the talk; we must walk the walk, too, because the language of hatred and exclusion has not gone away. To quote Sir Nicholas Winton, who rescued 669 children from Nazi-occupied Europe,

“Don’t be content in your life just to do no wrong, be prepared every day to try and do some good.”

Paul O’Kane has already mentioned young people, and I will focus with real pride on a few schools in towns and villages across my home

constituency of Uddingston and Bellshill. The first is St Gerard’s primary school in Bellshill, which has planned a school assembly to remember all those who were murdered during the Holocaust. The primary 7 class topic is already world war two. They will start studying the Holocaust on memorial day, linking that to racism, antisemitism and prejudice, and they will also celebrate the diversity and culture within their school, in North Lanarkshire and right the way across wider Scotland.

Next, we have Brannock high school out in Newarthill. Tomorrow, its themed event is “ordinary day”. That will be led by senior pupils who visited Auschwitz, again through the Holocaust Educational Trust. The students will play three pieces of Jewish music, which I think is lovely. Every pupil at the school has taken part in Holocaust lessons and made a butterfly to represent hope—all the butterflies put together made a touching visual display.

I was delighted to learn recently that the school has been awarded level 1 vision school status. Pupils will attend Parliament next month to receive their award, and members can expect a little motion from me on the detail about how the school won—I hope that they all sign up to it.

Finally, at Holy Cross high school in Hamilton, students are considering ordinary people, talking about turning a blind eye and believing in propaganda, and about how ordinary people join the murderous regimes that facilitate genocide, as Fergus Ewing pointed out. As well as commemorating victims of the Holocaust, pupils will consider more recent genocides and the relevance that those terrible events have for today’s world. They will talk about persecution, oppression and how genocide seeks to absolutely destroy particular groups of people; they will relate that to the challenges that Roma, Tutsi and other communities still face today.

Today, a PowerPoint presentation highlighting Holocaust atrocities will run continually in the main street area of the school, which all pupils will pass by. I give a special mention to a couple of sixth year pupils, Emma Murdoch and Ailish Donachie, who took part in the school’s lessons from Auschwitz programme. Those young women have been delivering presentations, and tomorrow’s will be followed by a sixth year ceremony, in which students will receive a little padlock on which they will write a message before fastening it to the fence outside the classroom area. The long-term plan is to establish a Holocaust memorial garden.

The lessons from Auschwitz programme is a long-standing tradition at Holy Cross. One of the current history teachers, Ms Lucy Ferguson, took part in it 10 years ago as a pupil; she is now encouraging her own pupils to get involved and is

working with Emma and Ailish to find next year's students to take part.

I am so proud of all the schools that are taking part in the Holocaust memorial day—the ones that I have mentioned and all the others that I have not. As I have said in the chamber previously, children and young people are everyone's future. Our children are the leaders of tomorrow and it is our children—ordinary children—in turn, who will seek to pass on the lessons of the Holocaust to future generations.

13:12

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in the debate, and I thank Fergus Ewing for lodging his motion and securing this time this afternoon.

As the decades pass and the generations of survivors and witnesses pass, too, it becomes more important than ever to remember not only the scale of the horror, but that each person who suffered or died was a particular, unique and irreplaceable individual.

So, we remember specific people, and we mourn their loss, not because those we can name are any more important than those whose names are lost to us, but because, as humans, we respond to human stories—to stories of specific people in specific places, carrying out particular and often extraordinary acts of courage, truth and love.

One such extraordinary, and yet profoundly ordinary, human was the writer and poet Gertrud Kolmar. She was born in Berlin into an assimilated Jewish family, worked as a teacher and interpreter, and had her first book of poems published in her very early twenties. In 1938, her book "The Woman and the Beasts" was ordered to be pulped and her family forced from their home. She had the opportunity to leave Germany but, in 1941, wrote the following to a relative who had reached safety:

"Believe me when I say that come what may I shall not be unhappy, I shall not despair, because I know that I am going the way I have chosen in my heart to go ... So many of us, through the centuries, have gone that way, why should I wish a different one? Even now, in these last moments, my father thought of emigrating to Uruguay to join his brother. There is a question whether it is still possible to do that; he wanted to leave for my sake—his own life he regards as ended—but I said no. It would be something forced on me solely by external circumstances; I don't want to run away from what I feel in my heart I ought to undergo. In the past I never knew, as I know now, how strong I am, and knowing this makes me very happy".

In 1941, she was ordered into forced labour at a munitions factory. The following year, her father was deported and murdered. Gertrud herself was

arrested at the factory in February 1943 and, on 2 March that year, she was transported, probably to Auschwitz. She was 48, and she was never heard from again.

However, she is not forgotten—not in Germany, where she is acclaimed as a great lyric poet, or beyond. In 2021, community organisers in Chicago began a campaign to dedicate the city's Kolmar park—previously named for a German town—to her honour. One of the insights underpinning the campaign was the realisation that a new generation of young adults knew little or nothing of the Holocaust and that this unique horror was fading into cultural oblivion. Last year, the campaign bore fruit and, in September, the park was rededicated to Gertrud Kolmar.

I will finish with translated extracts from one of Gertrud Kolmar's final poems, "We Jews", which was written in the stark knowledge of those dark days and of the consequences of her choice to stay. She wrote:

"Only the night listens. I love you, I love you, my people,
And want to hold you warm and close in my arms
As a woman embraces her husband bound to the
whipping post,
As a mother at the pondside won't let her reviled son
sink all alone.
And if a gag stifles the bleeding shriek in your mouth,
If your trembling arms are now cruelly bound,
Let mine be the cry that plummets into the pit of eternity,
Mine the hand that stretches to touch God's high heaven
...
Oh, if I could lift my voice like a flaring torch
In the dark waste of the world. Justice! Justice! Justice!"

13:16

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I, too, congratulate Fergus Ewing on securing this important debate.

In the 12 months since the Parliament last debated the Holocaust, we have witnessed reports of ethnically motivated atrocities being committed in western Tigray in Ethiopia; the murder of Ukrainian civilians and prisoners of war by Russian forces during the fight for and occupation of the Ukrainian city of Bucha, among other locations; and soldiers in the Myanmar military admitting to killing, torturing and raping civilians following an armed uprising. Those examples from three continents show that mass atrocities continue to be committed around the world.

That is why it is so important that, every year on Holocaust memorial day, this Parliament plays its part in remembering and discussing the systematic, bureaucratic and state-sponsored persecution and murder of 6 million Jewish men, women and children by the Nazi regime and its collaborators. To put that into perspective, that would be equivalent to more than Scotland's entire population being murdered within a few short

years. In addition, according to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 11 million other people were murdered during the era of the Holocaust.

As the theme of this year's Holocaust memorial day is "Ordinary People", it is vital to remember that, before the war, both victims and perpetrators were what one might call ordinary people.

It is 60 years since Hannah Arendt published "Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil" after witnessing the trial of Adolf Eichmann, a major figure in the implementation of the Holocaust. Arendt found Eichmann to be an ordinary and rather bland bureaucrat, who, in her words, was "neither perverted nor sadistic" but "terrifyingly normal". She certainly did not mean that evil had become ordinary or that Eichmann had committed a normal crime; she concluded that, rather than being a sadistic monster, he performed evil deeds due to lacking the ability to empathise. He obeyed orders and conformed without any critical evaluation or concern for the consequences of his actions. Indeed, in "Hitler's Willing Executioners", Daniel Goldhagen described how an ordinary police battalion—police battalion 101—carried out horrific murders with the same lack of critical evaluation.

That is exactly why Holocaust education remains of critical importance. It allows us to examine warning signs that indicate the potential for mass atrocity while raising questions about our own behaviour when faced with situations of prejudice, discrimination and dehumanisation.

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the Holocaust

"reveals the full range of human responses—raising important considerations about societal and individual motivations and pressures that lead people to act as they do—or to not act at all."

As Fergus Ewing's motion rightly states, the Holocaust also teaches us about the capacity of ordinary people to take extraordinary risks to save others from being murdered. Those honoured as the "righteous among the nations" at Yad Vashem, Israel's official memorial to the victims of the Holocaust, are non-Jews who protected Jews, including people sometimes unknown to them, when hostility and indifference prevailed and the penalty for harbouring Jews was the execution of one's entire family. Unlike others, they did not fall into a pattern of acquiescing to the escalating measures against Jews.

The list of well-known people honoured as the "righteous among the nations" includes people such as Oskar Schindler, Princess Alice of Battenberg and Frank Foley, among many others. Church of Scotland missionary Jane Haining from Dumfriesshire was matron at the predominantly

Jewish girls home of the Scottish mission in Budapest. In 1940, when Scottish missionaries were ordered to return home, Haining refused to leave, as she believed that her child charges needed her more than ever. That exposed her to great danger, and she was eventually arrested for working among Jews and deported to Auschwitz, where she sadly succumbed to starvation and the terrible camp conditions.

Teaching young people about the Holocaust enables them to develop an awareness of not only how violence and hatred can take hold but the power of solidarity and resistance. Many teachers in many Scottish schools already do vital work in providing a solid education on this difficult subject, as Stephanie Callaghan mentioned. Scottish Government grant funding to the Holocaust Educational Trust for the lessons from Auschwitz programme goes a long way. However, I agree with calls to make learning about the Holocaust a statutory requirement in the Scottish curriculum, as is the case in England and much of Europe.

The Holocaust lays bare the darkest recesses of human behaviour, and that should be recognised in our school curriculum. We must acknowledge that education is one of the most powerful weapons in the prevention of mass atrocities happening over and over again. It helps us to understand the circumstances under which it becomes possible for ordinary people to commit extraordinary acts of evil and for enough people to be indifferent bystanders to enable it to happen. By acquiring knowledge of the Holocaust, we learn about human weaknesses and possibilities in extremis and can question our own behaviour if ever confronted by such evil.

13:21

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): I thank Fergus Ewing for bringing this debate to the chamber today. As is stated in the motion, this year's theme for Holocaust memorial day is "Ordinary People", in recognition of the way in which ordinary people were involved in all elements of the Holocaust. The theme of "Ordinary People" has been broken down into five categories: perpetrators, bystanders, rescuers, witnesses and victims.

Many of us in the chamber and listening today will be aware of the poem "First They Came":

"First they came for the Communists
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a Communist"

It concludes:

"Then they came for me
And there was no one left
To speak out for me"

It was written by Pastor Martin Niemöller, who was a complicated figure. Initially an antisemitic Nazi supporter, he was later imprisoned in a concentration camp for speaking out against Nazi control of churches. After the war, he encouraged Germans to take responsibility for Nazi atrocities. He was an ordinary person, a bystander, a witness, a victim. We should look back, remember, learn and change.

We learn from the testimony of survivors such as Lily Ebert. Her quite remarkable book, "Lily's Promise: How I Survived Auschwitz and Found the Strength to Live", was co-written with her great-grandson. It is an incredibly moving story about Lily's early life in Hungary and how she survived the concentration camp when so many others, including her own family members, were exterminated. She found the strength to live. She is an ordinary person, but she continues to inspire others today.

My parents served King and country in the second world war. I well recall my mother's conversations when she would speak of that time. She was a young Wren during the time of the blitz. My father, an Army field cameraman, was embedded with the 14th Army in the far east fighting the Japanese in Burma. He saw close up the horrors of war.

My mother spoke of seeing the stark images that began to appear in cinema newsreels after the liberation of the camps. She described seeing those horrific images on the screen for the first time and how they were so shocking and vivid. Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen, Buchenwald—those names are forever associated with dehumanisation, never to be forgotten.

Generations since have been taught of the near destruction of a culture and images of horror, and they have been taught through the important work of the Holocaust Educational Trust and others that Paul O'Kane mentioned. At time for reflection in the chamber on Tuesday, we heard from Holly Cameron and Aidan Coleman, Holocaust Educational Trust ambassadors who spoke so eloquently.

As Pastor Niemöller reminds us, it was not only Jewish people who were subjected to the worst treatment of fellow humans but people from groups that were different—those who had different opinions and those of a different race and sexual orientation. The liberal democratic structures that we have built in the post-war era are vulnerable and fragile and need to be cherished.

Since the Holocaust, we have witnessed genocides in the killing fields of Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur. Today, humanity is still inhumane to humanity. In Afghanistan, we see

the unequal and oppressive treatment of young girls and women who have been forbidden from learning, and in Ukraine a nation fights for its survival in an unprovoked conflict. However, the world has come together in an unprecedented way to unite to support Ukraine, recognising the will to avoid a war that is touching every corner of the globe, and supporting free people who are backing a democratic Government. Even in the darkest of times for humanity, the flame of the best in humanity flickers.

13:25

The Minister for Equalities and Older People (Christina McKelvie): I express my thanks to Fergus Ewing for lodging this important motion and for highlighting the significance of Holocaust memorial day, as other members have done. Maggie Chapman spoke about those whose names we remember and those whose names we do not. I commend to my colleagues in the chamber and anyone who is listening the Auschwitz memorial Twitter page, which every day remembers all those names. It is important to be able to look across the chamber and see members united in paying our respects to the millions of people who lost their lives as a result of Nazi persecution as well as those who perished in the genocides that took place in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur.

As Fergus Ewing and Alexander Stewart have said, this year's theme for Holocaust memorial day, "Ordinary People", is particularly poignant. It shines a light on the measurable and devastating impact that the Holocaust and later genocides had on the ordinary lives of the ordinary people who were persecuted and murdered. As we are so painfully aware, the victims of genocide were singled out for no other reason than who they were or the group that they belonged to: Jews, disabled people, Gypsy Travellers, Roma, Sinti, LGBTI, black people and others. History has taught us that the Nazis and their collaborators targeted anyone who they perceived to be different, thereby claiming the lives of millions and millions of people.

Ordinary people facilitated those genocides. Ordinary people participated and turned a blind eye. Yet, in the darkest period of the atrocities, as Beatrice Wishart has said, ordinary people, at great risk to their own lives, helped to rescue others and went to extraordinary lengths to provide safety to those who were most at risk. For those acts of immense courage, we should all be for ever indebted.

I remember our own Jane Haining, who refused to leave the children she looked after and so perished with them in the gas chambers. Fergus Ewing gave us an insight into the work of Leslie

Wolfson in Russia. We think of all the human rights defenders—past, present and future—who have faced and are facing atrocities around the world. It is understandable that we wish to contain those abhorrent tragedies to the past and to think of them as something that could never conceivably happen again. However, as Stephanie Callaghan reminded us, regrettably the hateful attitudes that people drew on to sow the seeds of the Holocaust and subsequent genocides continue to blight our society. Kenny Gibson gave us a stark reminder of the continued violence in places around the world, including the massacre in Ukraine. Beatrice Wishart reminded us about the women in Afghanistan and Iran.

It is for that reason that we remain absolutely resolute in our commitment to tackling hatred and prejudice in all its forms, whenever it may arise. That is why we will shortly be publishing our new hate crime strategy, which sets our priorities for tackling hatred and prejudice in Scotland. Lived experience has been, and will continue to be, at the heart of our approach to tackling hate crime. We are grateful to those who have shared their experiences of prejudice and hate crime in order to help to inform the development of our strategy. Our vision is for a safe, resilient and inclusive Scotland, where everyone lives free from hatred and prejudice, and our new strategy will set out how we will work collectively towards that goal.

Many speakers today have highlighted the role of education and the brilliant work in our schools, and we heard that immense work is going on across all the schools in many of our constituencies. I know that we will all agree that education to ensure that we can effectively tackle hatred and prejudice in Scotland is incredibly important.

Paul O’Kane reminded us of the work of Henry and Ingrid Wuga, whom I had the great honour to meet in this Parliament. That was many years ago, but we will never forget their story, because they told us their story and they continue to tell it.

This week, we had the privilege of hearing from two of the Holocaust Educational Trust’s lessons from Auschwitz project ambassadors. Their reflections demonstrate the power of Holocaust education to support our children and young people to develop as compassionate, confident individuals and responsible members of society.

A few years ago, the Scottish Government funded young Gypsy Traveller community members to go to Auschwitz to learn about the Sinti uprising and the work that is being done. Alexander Stewart, who is smiling away, has written to me on issues around the group that he spoke about. I am working on a response and I will get that to him as soon as I can.

This evening, alongside the First Minister, I will attend an event that is being organised by the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust and hosted by Paul O’Kane here in the Scottish Parliament. I very much look forward to the valuable opportunity to commemorate the Holocaust and subsequent genocides, as well as to demonstrate our commitment to tackling present-day hatred and prejudice. I thank the organisers for their tireless dedication in ensuring that the victims continue to be honoured. Yesterday, Paul O’Kane and I were reflecting on the immense work that Kirsty Robson does, so I think that we should give her a shout-out for that.

Tonight’s event provides an opportunity to hear directly from survivors of both the Holocaust and the Bosnian genocide. Those are ordinary people, like Gertrud Kolmar and Jane Haining, who experienced tremendous suffering but displayed remarkable resilience in the face of dire circumstances.

We remember in many ways and, for me, poetry has always been a powerful learning tool. Beatrice Wishart reminded us very clearly of the poem “First they came”, so I will draw the chamber’s attention to a poem that I look at now and again, which reminds me about how such things can happen in ordinary ways. It is a poem by Michael Rosen, who has written a book that has been used in schools across the land for the past couple of years—“The Missing: The True Story of My Family in World War II”.

In his poem, “Fascism: I sometimes fear...”, Michael Rosen says:

“I sometimes fear that
people think that fascism arrives in fancy dress
worn by grotesques and monsters
as played out in endless re-runs of the Nazis.

Fascism arrives as your friend.
It will restore your honour,
make you feel proud,
protect your house,
give you a job,
clean up the neighbourhood,
remind you of how great you once were,
clear out the venal and the corrupt,
remove anything you feel is unlike you...

It doesn’t walk in saying,
‘Our programme means militias, mass imprisonments,
transportations,
war and persecution.’”

As I conclude, I offer a final reflection. Genocide does not come out of nowhere, as Michael Rosen demonstrated in his poem. It is a result of years of unchallenged prejudice and hatred. As we reflect on this year’s theme, if we take away only one thing, it should be the recognition of the responsibility that we all have to challenge prejudice and hatred wherever and whenever it occurs. Let the Holocaust and other genocides be

stark warnings that what happened before can happen again, and let us make sure that it does not.

13:33

Meeting suspended.

14:00

On resuming—

Portfolio Question Time

Social Justice, Housing and Local Government

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): Good afternoon. The next item of business is portfolio question time, and the first portfolio is social justice, housing and local government.

I remind members that questions 4 and 5 are grouped together. I will take any supplementaries on those questions after both have been answered. If a member wishes to ask a supplementary question, they should press their request-to-speak button, or indicate so in the chat function by typing “RTS” during the relevant question.

Local Government (Economic Conditions)

1. **Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with local government about any impact the prevailing economic conditions are having on the delivery of local services. (S6O-01820)

The Minister for Social Security and Local Government (Ben Macpherson): Ministers and officials meet the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and individual local authorities on a regular basis to cover a range of issues, including support and the delivery of front-line services.

The budget acknowledges the corrosive effect of inflation on our finances and those of all public services. Recognising those challenges, last week the Deputy First Minister and the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government wrote jointly to COSLA to reaffirm our commitment to working with local government on how we can operate and collaborate on reform to ensure that we provide sustainable people-centred services.

Michelle Thomson: Like the Scottish Government, my local council, Falkirk Council, has been affected by the economic chaos that the Tory-led Westminster Government has overseen. Inflation, in particular, is a huge issue, which has a resultant impact on the cost of delivering key services and capital projects.

What further fiscal flexibilities is the Scottish Government considering for councils as they, too, struggle with the latest wave of Westminster austerity?

Ben Macpherson: Michelle Thomson has raised important points. The Scottish Government

is working with COSLA and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers to agree a new deal for local government in Scotland that will give councils greater certainty and flexibility, and greater scope for discretionary revenue raising, including through potential changes to council tax and the introduction in Parliament, in due course, of a local visitor levy bill.

We would welcome further suggestions from local government. We make that point to local authorities regularly, and we will engage constructively on proposals from them and others. However, we would also welcome support from across the Parliament as the Scottish Government continues to press the United Kingdom Government for additional funding to invest in our public services, including the key priorities that we share with our partners in local government.

Landlords (Guidance on Damp Prevention)

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

To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on what guidance it gives to landlords in all sectors to help to prevent and deal with damp, condensation and mould in their properties, including when this was last revised. (S6O-01821)

The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights (Patrick Harvie): The Scottish Housing Regulator wrote to all social landlords on 1 December 2022 on the importance of having appropriate systems to identify cases of mould and damp. The regulator works with the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations and the Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers to identify and promote good practice.

For private landlords, the tolerable standard, which includes standards on dampness, was incorporated into the repairing standard in 2019. That means that issues can be raised with the First-Tier Tribunal for Scotland, which has powers to require landlords to carry out repairs to meet the standards.

Mark Griffin: I think that most people would agree that it is utterly devastating that it has taken the tragic case of Awaab Ishak for damp, mould and condensation to rise up the public debate agenda.

In Scotland, beyond the estimates that we get from the Scottish house condition survey, we do not have an entirely accurate picture of how bad the issue is. No statistics are provided by the

Government or the regulator that allow us to identify particular problem areas or problem buildings. Will the Government instruct that an urgent data review be carried out across local authorities, registered landlords and private sector associations, and commit to issuing interim guidance on how to tackle the issue, which seems to be becoming more and more commonplace—certainly, judging from the contents of MSP colleagues' inboxes?

Patrick Harvie: I certainly share Mark Griffin's sentiment about the case of Awaab Ishak and the reaction that it has provoked throughout the United Kingdom, including in Scotland.

It is worth reinforcing the fact that Scottish housing has been improving. In 2019, the Scottish house condition survey showed that 91 per cent of homes in Scotland were completely free from any sign of damp or condensation, which is an improvement on 86 per cent in 2012.

There is still much more to do, which is why we will consult on a new cross-tenure housing standard that will move beyond traditional models of fitness for human habitation to a new model that meets people's expectations of housing as a human right and delivers homes that underpin health and wellbeing. Mark Griffin is right to say that there is more that we need to do: we will keep the issue under active consideration.

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): The minister will be aware that the Scottish house condition survey pointed towards 14 per cent of social sector homes having issues with either mould or damp. Will the Scottish Government consider putting in place a reporting system to track the issue in the socially rented sector, and might that system also be extended?

Patrick Harvie: In my first answer to Mark Griffin, I set out the requirements that already exist for the social rented sector. Landlords are required to meet the Scottish housing quality standard as part of the Scottish social housing charter. Progress against that standard is monitored by the Scottish Housing Regulator. Guidance on meeting the standards, including detailed advice on dealing with damp, is already provided to social landlords and is regularly updated. We are also working on the repairing standard that is due to come into force for the private rented sector next year.

I reinforce the message that significant work is under way in the area and that we will continue to ensure that any further actions that are required are taken in the future.

Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): Inability by a household to properly heat their home can make any problems with mould and damp much worse. Will the cabinet secretary outline the support that is available to households

in Scotland who aim to improve energy efficiency and lower their energy bills while keeping their homes warm and free of damp?

Patrick Harvie: I am grateful for that inadvertent promotion to cabinet secretary. Home Energy Scotland is our flagship domestic energy efficiency service. It provides free and impartial advice on energy efficiency, renewable heating and fuel poverty, and it provides support for people in Scotland to go greener at home while reducing their bills.

Home Energy Scotland is the main referral point for our funding schemes, including warmer homes Scotland, which is our national fuel poverty scheme, and the new Home Energy Scotland grant and loan scheme. We are also investing £64 million in 2023-24 as part of our locally delivered area-based schemes, which is enabling more fuel-poor households to benefit from a whole-house retrofit. As I have in the past, I encourage all members to ensure that their constituents are aware of those forms of support and advice.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): What more can the Scottish Government do to provide practical tools and guidance to landlords to measure damp, condensation and mould, and to provide advice and support to tenants to establish the correct insulation and ventilation for modern and older homes, in order to prevent instances such as that involving the two-year-old who died in England?

Patrick Harvie: Several of the areas of activity that I have already mentioned, particularly the advice and support that is available for householders from Home Energy Scotland, go some way towards addressing Beatrice Wishart's question. I also mentioned the work on developing a cross-tenure housing standard that will move beyond the concept of fitness for human habitation and towards standards to deliver homes that will underpin health and wellbeing. All that work will continue to address the issues that the member raises.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 3 has not been lodged.

Before I call question 4, I say that, as members will be aware, a petition for judicial review of the Cost of Living (Tenant Protection) (Scotland) Act 2022 has been lodged with the court. I make it clear, therefore, that questions 4 and 5 were lodged prior to the petition for judicial review. However, for the purposes of the sub judice rule, members should avoid referring to matters that are under consideration in the on-going judicial review and to the specific provisions of the Cost of Living (Tenant Protection) (Scotland) Act 2022 that are under challenge.

I call question 4.

Rent Freeze (Effect on Availability)

4. Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the effects of the current rent freeze on the availability of rented accommodation. (S6O-01823)

The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights (Patrick Harvie): Although it is an administrative rather than a statistical source, the most recent sector-wide data is from the Scottish landlord registration system, which shows that, in December 2022, there were 340,149 private rented properties registered in Scotland. That is slightly more than the 339,632 properties that were registered in August 2022.

The Scottish Government monitors landlord registration data monthly. Landlord registration and related data was analysed in our first report to the Scottish Parliament on the operation of the Cost of Living (Tenant Protection) (Scotland) Act 2022, which was published on 12 January.

Liz Smith: The minister will know that a topic of very considerable debate at the Finance and Public Administration Committee in recent weeks has been the concern over behavioural change arising from some aspects of Scottish Government policy. The rent freeze is just one example. It is all very well to say that it is helping with the cost of living situation, which it is, but it is also creating some worrying reactions from landlords, which are now hindering rather than helping the housing market. Does the Scottish Government recognise the serious concern about that?

Patrick Harvie: I am very pleased that Liz Smith acknowledges that the actions that we are taking and have taken are helping with the cost of living crisis and are necessary for people in that context.

I am aware of surveys that have been carried out by landlord bodies that look at the possible intentions of landlords in the future. I caution that it is difficult to interpret those because they relate to what landlords may or may not choose to do in the future. That does not translate directly into the number of properties that might be affected, nor does it take into account new landlords entering the sector.

As I said in my first answer, there has been no fall in the number of properties on the landlord registration system. However, I acknowledge that it would take some time from any decision to sell before a sale was completed and the property deregistered, so we will continue to monitor trends in the register and other data.

Over the longer term, it is really important to acknowledge that, since devolution, the Scottish

household survey has shown a very significant growth in private rented sector tenancies through a period of increased regulation.

Rent Freeze (Effect on Availability)

5. Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what analysis it has conducted on the effect of the rent cap on the number of homes available for rent in the private sector. (S6O-01824)

The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights (Patrick Harvie): I refer Mr Simpson to the answer that I have just given to Liz Smith. The private rented sector is dynamic: it is made up of tens of thousands of small-scale landlords and there is constant coming and going within the sector. Those landlords who leave the sector may, in turn, sell to other landlords, and of course new landlords enter the sector.

It is significant that the size of the private rented sector has more than doubled over the long term since devolution, even during a period of generally tightening regulation. As is acknowledged in the report from the cross-party group on housing, which Mr Simpson is involved in, regulated markets can in fact be attractive to institutional investors.

Graham Simpson: I thank the minister for that answer, but he appears to be in denial on the matter, because data from Propertymark shows that 85 per cent of letting agents have reported that landlords want to sell up. The Scottish Property Federation estimates that £700 million in residential investment has been paused or lost. Will the minister at least accept that, if the Government imposes policies such as blanket rent freezes, they can have negative consequences?

Patrick Harvie: I remind Mr Simpson of what I have said repeatedly on the matter. I hope that he is not in denial of the reality, which is that the number of registered properties in the private rented sector has not decreased. It increased slightly over the first three months, between August and December. We will keep that under review.

The work that Graham Simpson referred to as "data" is surveys of landlords' possible intentions in the future. It is not data about properties actually being deregistered and no longer being available in the private rented sector.

I come back to the wider point that, if we look not only at the past 20 years or so of the private rented sector's more than doubling in a period of tighter regulation but at the experience of a number of other European countries where the rental market is more regulated, bigger and more viable than ours, it is perfectly clear that an

approach that seeks to achieve everyone's human right to adequate housing is entirely compatible with a viable rental market.

Scottish Child Payment (Coatbridge and Chryston)

6. Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how many children are estimated to be eligible for the Scottish child payment in the Coatbridge and Chryston constituency. (S6O-01825)

The Minister for Social Security and Local Government (Ben Macpherson): Official statistics for the Scottish child payment, including application and payment data by local authority area, are routinely published by Social Security Scotland.

The Scottish Fiscal Commission produces estimates and forecasts of eligibility for the Scottish child payment, but only for Scotland as a whole, rather than by region. However, internal Scottish Government analysis suggests that around 7,000 children in the Coatbridge and Chryston constituency could be eligible for the Scottish child payment each year from 2022-23 to 2027-28.

The Scottish child payment is getting money to low-income households at a crucial time, and more families than ever are eligible for support, which is a good thing for Fulton MacGregor's constituents and families all across Scotland.

Fulton MacGregor: The payment will indeed make a significant difference to families in my constituency. In the face of the soaring inflation that has been caused by the United Kingdom Government's economic mismanagement, it is most welcome that the Scottish Government has continued to prioritise investment in measures that will help to eradicate child poverty.

I am aware that the Scottish Government is investing significantly more in social security than the funding that it receives from the UK Government. Will the minister outline what that spending will achieve?

Ben Macpherson: In 2023-24, we are committing £5.2 billion to benefit expenditure, providing support to more than 1 million people. That includes £442 million for the Scottish child payment. That £5.2 billion is £776 million above the level of funding that is forecast to be received by the Scottish Government from the UK Government through block grant adjustments. The choice that we have taken represents a significant investment in people and is key to our national mission to tackle child poverty collectively. It will help low-income families with their living costs, support older people to heat their homes in winter

and enable disabled people to live full and independent lives.

East Renfrewshire Council (Meetings)

7. Paul O’Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government when it last met with East Renfrewshire Council. (S6O-01826)

The Minister for Social Security and Local Government (Ben Macpherson): Ministers and officials have regular meetings with representatives of all Scottish local authorities, including East Renfrewshire Council, to discuss a wide range of issues, as part of our commitment to working in partnership with local government to improve outcomes for the people and communities of Scotland. We also regularly meet the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. East Renfrewshire Council has never specifically requested a meeting with me but, if it ever wanted to do so, I would, of course, be open to such an invitation.

Paul O’Kane: The minister spoke about partnership working, but he will recognise COSLA’s disappointment that the Government has again refused to engage on local government finance. Indeed, the much-acclaimed £550 million in additional funding for local authorities is political spin: the figure has been condemned by COSLA and new analysis has revealed that the reality is closer to just £38 million. East Renfrewshire Council has been dealt a flat cash settlement, despite soaring inflation at more than 9 per cent, and faces a £30 million shortfall.

Given the proportion of income that comes from the Government’s general revenue funding, local authorities are being forced by the Scottish National Party Government to make unthinkable cuts to local government services and/or to raise council tax. What choice would the minister advise East Renfrewshire to make: reduce school opening hours or make large increases to council tax? When will the Government get back round the table with councils such as East Renfrewshire and give communities a fair deal?

Ben Macpherson: I assure the member that Scottish Government ministers regularly meet COSLA, as the representative body for local authorities. They have done so in recent weeks; indeed, there will be further engagement later today.

On the financial situation, it is factually correct to state that the local government settlement has increased by more than £570 million in cash terms. That is in the context of our settlements from the UK Government having suffered a decade of austerity, with average real-terms cuts of more than 5 per cent, equating to a loss of £18 billion. In that context, as I have said, we are

increasing the resource available to local government by £570 million, which is a real-terms increase of £160.6 million, or 1.3 per cent.

I appreciate the strong feelings on the matter in local government and among members, and I can assure the member and other colleagues that we are engaged constructively and seriously with local government. If Mr O’Kane has suggestions with regard to the budget process, he should submit constructive proposals to finance ministers. The Scottish budget has been affected significantly by inflation and public finances are under pressure in the round so we need to be solution focused together. If Mr O’Kane has any constructive suggestions, I am sure that my finance colleagues would welcome them.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 8 has been withdrawn, so that concludes portfolio questions. There will be a very short pause before we move to the next item of business, to allow the front-bench teams to take their positions.

Strategic Transport Projects Review 2

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a statement by Michael Matheson on the second strategic transport projects review. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:22

The Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport (Michael Matheson): I am very pleased to provide an update on the second strategic transport projects review. The final report was published on 8 December last year, and it marked the culmination of more than three years of work by Transport Scotland and its consultants. I express my gratitude to stakeholders across the country, particularly those in local and regional authorities, for their input to the process since the outset, and also to the public, and indeed our young people of Scotland, who provided an excellent range of entries for the schools competition. It was a great pleasure to meet and discuss the review with some of the pupils from Musselburgh grammar school and Stoneyhill primary school here in Parliament last month.

The final publication of STPR2 represents a key milestone for transport planning in Scotland. In it, we set out a 20-year framework for capital investment to drive the change that we need to reach our ambitious—and essential—net zero goals. The era of catering for unconstrained growth in private car use is now well and truly over. The majority of the recommendations directly contribute to achieving a reduction in both emissions and dependency on the private car. Although we will not be able to deliver them all immediately, or all at once, I am pleased to say that we are already making progress on 38 of the 45 recommendations. Right from the outset, collaboration, stakeholder engagement and public consultation have been fundamental and have been at the very heart of the three-year process, from gathering problems and opportunities to the detailed appraisal undertaken as part of the later stages of that work.

Following publication of the draft report, which I announced to the chamber a year ago, there was a statutory public consultation. The 45 recommendations had been informed and tested throughout several previous rounds of engagement. We were therefore confident that the final consultation would be on refinement and affirmation of those recommendations rather than suggestions for wholesale change. Of course, I was encouraged that that was the outcome. The consultation included 30 information sessions and

attracted 424 responses. That invaluable feedback was considered in detail and fed directly into the production of the suite of final reports.

I will now touch on what STPR2 recommends. Four key areas of investment will help us to make truly transformational changes to how we travel in Scotland. They are: decarbonising public transport; improving active travel infrastructure; improving connectivity in our rural and island communities; and establishing mass transit systems in our biggest city regions.

In the first such area we are pressing on with our plans to decarbonise Scotland's rail network and are building on the £62 million awarded to bus operators last February for the acquisition of zero-emission buses. We are already supporting the implementation of our vision for Scotland's electric vehicle charging through the £60 million public electric vehicle infrastructure fund, which will draw in commercial investment so that in future the charging network will work for everyone.

Our second key area is providing greater opportunities for people to walk, wheel or cycle. We want to work with local authorities to deliver ambitious active travel infrastructure projects. Our investment in that mode has risen significantly in recent years: from £40 million in 2017-18 to a record £150 million for 2022-23.

Our third focus is on improved connectivity in our rural and island communities. As well as significant investment in port infrastructure and strategic road connections, our commitments to our islands include investment in new vessels for Arran, Islay and the Skye triangle. The review also recommends the further investigation of potential fixed-link connections at the Sound of Harris and the Sound of Barra, and between Mull and the Scottish mainland.

Our fourth key area centres on delivering transformational change in public transport infrastructure. At its core, we plan to transform public transport across the Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Glasgow city regions by introducing in each a new mass transit system that will offer a real alternative to the private car. Elsewhere, we will invest in rail, particularly between our major cities, and offer buses far greater priority on many routes in urban centres across Scotland.

I know that some people will be disappointed by the lack of inclusion in the 45 recommendations of their favoured local rail or road projects such as the extension of the Borders railway or the construction of a rail line north of Aberdeen to Fraserburgh and Peterhead. However, it is also important to stress that there remains a route to consider projects not included in the recommendations, on the basis of their

demonstrating a robust business case, and subject to appropriate funding being available.

Although I have been at pains to note that none of the recommendations involves increasing capacity for cars on our roads, feedback from stakeholders has stressed the importance of a reliable and resilient strategic road network. Recommendations for our strategic roads focus on safety, climate change adaptation and resilience.

For safety improvements there will be a primary, but not exclusive, focus on rural sections, with exact locations to be determined by further and on-going work. Some recommendations include essential maintenance and upgrades, not least for the south-west, where measures have been identified to address long-standing calls for targeted improvements on the A75 and the A77—topics that have often been discussed in the chamber.

The recommendations that I have described represent an ambitious plan for investment for the next 20 years. However, 20 years is a long time, and it is important that we remain agile in order to address needs that may arise or become more prominent. We had intended to publish a delivery plan alongside STPR2 to set out how and when it is envisaged that each of the recommendations will be delivered. However, given the fiscal and budgetary uncertainty over the past few months, that has been neither practical nor possible.

The fact that we are constrained by reliance on the UK Government for capital grant allocations, as well as our limited capital borrowing powers, has added to the uncertainty. All that has resulted in a decision to take more time to create a fully informed and accurate delivery plan. The plan will continue to be developed over the coming months, informed by the draft budget for the coming financial year, with the intention that it will be published in the spring.

I am very proud of the vast amount of work that has gone into STPR2, and of the direction in which it is taking us as a nation. That is reflected in the supportive and positive comments that we have received from a number of stakeholders, including Strathclyde Partnership for Transport, Sustrans and ScotRail.

We know that change will not be easy for people to make; that is why the review is focused on creating the infrastructure, on connectivity and on delivering the transport modes that will help people change how, why and when they travel. Transforming Scotland's transport requires a cohesive national effort and a repositioning of the type of transport investment that the Government makes. By doing that, however, we can deliver significant and lasting benefits for the people and

businesses in Scotland, creating a Scotland that is less polluted, less congested and healthier.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues raised in his statement. I intend to allow around 20 minutes for questions, after which we will move on to the next item of business. It would be helpful if those members who wish to ask a question were to press their request-to-speak buttons now.

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of his statement, which should have been delivered when STPR2 was released at the end of last year. The document did not set the heather alight then, and his statement certainly will not have done so today. We have been given no idea when key routes that are vital to the economy and to road safety, such as the A9, the A96, the A75 and the A77, will be upgraded. That is what people want to know.

The cabinet secretary mentioned the Glasgow metro system, which may extend to where I live, in East Kilbride. I do not think that there is a cat in hell's chance of it ever happening, but if my natural cynicism is misplaced and I am wrong, what is the timescale?

The cabinet secretary mentioned further investigation of potential fixed-link connections to various islands. If locals want that, is he today committing to such links?

Finally, on rural transport, rural residents tell me that bus operators are shifting their older diesel buses from city routes to rural routes. What reassurance can the cabinet secretary give that electrification of buses will extend to all areas?

Michael Matheson: I will try to deal with a couple of those issues. The member referred to four areas of the trunk road network: the A9, the A96, the A75 and the A77. He may not be aware of this, but I would have thought that he, as the transport spokesperson for the Conservative Party, would recognise that the A9 and the A96 are not within the scope of STPR2, because they are part of the previous STPR process.

Now that I have pointed that out to the member, he will recognise that we are—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Members, members. We need to listen to the cabinet secretary.

Michael Matheson: The member will recognise that we are already carrying out the review of the A96. I am sure that he will eventually get a grip of his brief on these matters.

On the timescale for the Glasgow metro, given that he says that he is sceptical about the project ever being undertaken, it might come as a surprise

to the member to learn that the leadership team, which has already been brought together to work on the development plan for the Glasgow metro and is chaired by Transport Scotland, is already taking that forward. Further work will be set out over the course of the creation of the business case for the metro during this year.

On the island fixed links, the STPR2 documents—which I am sure the member has taken the time to read—say that we will take forward further investigations into the fixed-links options for the islands that have been referred to, and will consider them against alternative options such as the existing ferry links, the benefits to public transport and the cost to the taxpayer.

I recognise the member's final point, about older buses. Much of the electrification of the bus network that we have sought has happened in our large urban areas, although in Aberdeenshire there has been an expansion of—I think—the Stagecoach electric bus network into some of the rural areas. I expect that, as we see further roll-out in support of the decarbonisation of the bus network, we will see more of that in our more rural areas. However, it is critically important that we have the right grid infrastructure for the electrification necessary to support the greater use of electric buses in our rural areas, including in the member's region.

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of his statement. The track record of this Government and cabinet secretary on transport projects is one of overpromising and underdelivering. With the STPR2, the cabinet secretary might surpass himself by underpromising and underdelivering.

On new ferries and new trains, we have a strategy that is years late, and there is still no sign of a delivery plan or budget. However, what communities already know is that there will be no dualling of the A9 by 2025, as promised in the previous review, and probably no dualling of the A96. With regard to this review, none of the modest projects planned for the A75 or A77 will happen in this parliamentary session, and a rail link to Glasgow airport has never been so far away. The cabinet secretary knows full well that the routes for the Borders railway and rail in the north-east, which he claims to be outwith STPR2, have no meaningful budget.

Given this Government's record on delivering transport budgets over budget and overdue, why should any community believe the cabinet secretary when he finally gets around to telling us when the projects in STPR2 will be delivered? What will he do this time to avoid the failures of the past?

Michael Matheson: The member made reference in particular to the Glasgow airport rail link. He might not be aware that the Glasgow metro scheme involves a connection to the airport, which is part of the recommendations in STPR2.

On the work that has been undertaken, I can reassure the member that it had been our intention to publish the delivery plan alongside STPR2. However, the budgetary uncertainty that was created by the United Kingdom Government in the autumn of last year has delayed that whole process, which has meant that we have had to delay taking forward the delivery plan work.

I assure that member that, as we undertake that work over the next couple of months, alongside our budget process, we will do so in a way that helps to give as much indication as possible of the timeframes for the various projects that are set out in the STPR2 plan for the next 20 years.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): STPR2 makes a commitment to improve journey times on the Glasgow to Carlisle rail line, and the cabinet secretary rightly mentions the A75 and A77 arterial routes, which need improvement based on safety and efficiency concerns. Can the cabinet secretary comment further on the process by which the Glasgow-Carlisle line will be improved and say when we will see shovels in the ground to take forward the recommendations for the A75 and A77?

Michael Matheson: I recognise the member's longstanding interest in transport upgrades in the south-west of Scotland, including on the A75 and A77. Recommendation 40 in STPR2 is about improving access to Stranraer and the port of Cairnryan. That is part of the rail investment programmes that we are looking to progress as part of the delivery plan that will be taken forward over the next couple of months. The STPR2 delivery plan will also provide details of the work that we intend to take forward on the A75 and the A77 as part of our wider capital spending programme.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): A 2017 report said that, unless a roundabout was built at the Toll of Birness, there would be no safe gaps to join the A90 by 2023. Since then, the Government has spent just £67,000 on safety measures at the Toll of Birness. This week, there was yet another accident at that notorious junction.

In April 2019, the then transport minister said that upgrading the A90 between Ellon and Peterhead would be part of STPR2. Last June, the current transport minister said that safety work at the Toll of Birness can now be undertaken as part of the wider STPR2. However, the Toll of Birness is absent from STPR2. Will the cabinet secretary

commit to doing what is needed, or does STPR2 mark the end for road safety at the Toll of Birness?

Michael Matheson: My thoughts are, of course, with anyone who has been involved in a road traffic accident at that particular junction. I am aware of the long-standing concerns and issues that have been raised about that particular junction and that some additional safety measures have been introduced, including the vehicle-activated signs. However, the provisions relating to improvements on key parts of our trunk road network are covered by recommendation 30 in STPR2, which is about focusing on the trunk road and motorway safety provision. That could include areas throughout the network, including on the A90. Therefore, there is provision in the STPR for specific areas.

However, that will be taken forward against all the other areas across the trunk road network that require improvements, particularly where safety improvements are needed. Which improvements should be progressed and within what timeframe will be evaluated.

I reassure Liam Kerr that, where there are requirements to improve safety on the trunk road network, STPR2 and recommendation 30 make provision for their being able to take place.

Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): The cabinet secretary mentioned the commitment to examine the case for fixed links on the Sound of Barra and the Sound of Harris. Aside from the obvious benefits, there is another incentive, given the Maritime and Coastguard Agency's reclassification of those waters and the potential implications for the type of replacement vessels that will eventually be required. Can the cabinet secretary give an update on that aspect of the issue?

Michael Matheson: I am, of course, aware of the need to consider how we can replace the vessels on the western isles. For that reason, STPR2 made a recommendation to undertake further work on developing a business case to better understand what the benefits, costs and challenges associated with providing fixed links across the Sound of Harris and the Sound of Barra would be, in part for the reasons that Alasdair Allan referred to. That process will involve evaluating the cost benefits of a fixed link against continuing with the existing ferry network and how that would impact on the public purse. As we consider that process, it will, of course be important to engage with the local communities to allow them to express their views on the impact that there would be on their respective areas.

The timescale for taking that forward will be set out in the delivery plan in the coming months, so that Alasdair Allan and his constituents will have a

clear understanding of the process that will be taken forward in considering potential fixed links.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): In a recent article in *The Herald*, the leader of Glasgow City Council called for "bold leadership" and "detailed progress" on a Clyde metro project. She will not find that in today's statement or in the review documents, despite the fine words and laudable aims. Instead, there is a vague recommendation to continue to work with regional partners. That feels like history repeating itself from a Government that has overpromised and underdelivered for the west of Scotland. Given that the Scottish National Party has scrapped three proposals to link Glasgow airport with the city centre via Paisley over the past 16 years and that it seems incapable of delivering such a link, why should anyone believe that the Government is serious about a Clyde metro project?

Michael Matheson: I thought that that was a very good article by Susan Aitken, who highlighted the considerable work that Glasgow City Council has taken forward with some of its regional partners in the connectivity commission and the ambitious proposals that they have set out in that. That demonstrates great leadership from Glasgow City Council, and Susan Aitken in particular, and I thought that the article reflected their great ambitions. I am sure that Neil Bibby will agree with me on that.

One of the key recommendations that came directly from the connectivity commission is in STPR2. That is the recommendation for the Clyde metro, which is a hugely ambitious, multibillion-pound investment programme to improve connectivity right across the Glasgow City region. That will improve connectivity not only between towns but within key areas where transport connectivity is poor, particularly in some of our lower-income communities. The plan is to look at how we can connect such communities much more effectively through the Clyde metro proposals, which are one of the key recommendations in STPR2.

Given that the member thinks that the Clyde metro proposal is a hugely ambitious programme, I am sure that he will recognise that the fact that it is in STPR2 demonstrates just how ambitious STPR2 actually is.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): One of the objectives of STPR2 is to improve safety and resilience. I take on board the cabinet secretary's comments about the A96 dualling being a commitment of the previous strategic transport projects review. However, it is the biggest transport concern of my constituents in Aberdeenshire East, thousands of whom expressed safety concerns in the A96 review consultation. A great deal of scoping and planning

work has already been undertaken, in the last parliamentary session, so my constituents will be expecting me to ask—once the review is complete, is there scope for the project to be reactivated and for the dualling to be completed?

Michael Matheson: I fully recognise Gillian Martin's long-standing interest in representing her constituents on issues relating to the A96. The member will be aware that the public consultation and the initial appraisal work reports on the A96 corridor review were published at the end of December. We are now pushing forward with the next phase, which is further detailed work to inform the remaining stages of the review. Those will include a robust appraisal of the 16 retained options, including a climate compatibility assessment, with outcomes expected to be announced in the first half of this year. That will then be put out for final public consultation before a final outcome is decided. I assure the member that the transport minister will ensure that there is an opportunity for members of the Scottish Parliament who represent the areas affected by the A96 to feed into that process.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): I thank the Presiding Officer for dispensation to leave early today. I also thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of the statement.

Last week, Fair Isle received good news of a successful bid for UK levelling up funding to replace its ageing lifeline ferry to mainland Shetland. STPR2 does not look at internal ferry services, which—despite what the cabinet secretary says about focusing on improved connectivity in rural and island communities—are rapidly ageing, with some in the northern isles needing imminent replacement.

I also note the positive responses in the STPR2 consultation to fixed links for Shetland. Will the cabinet secretary therefore ensure that the Scottish Government now works with local authorities and interested groups to progress feasibility studies into such projects for Shetland and to pursue local solutions with fellow island groups?

Michael Matheson: I am sure that the member recognises that a significant amount of investment goes into supporting our island authorities to deliver the local ferry network. I think that there has been investment in the region of £130 million over the past five years alone to support and sustain the network. Ferry services are not within the scope of STPR2, because they are local services in the same way as other transport provision is in other local authorities. Nevertheless, we continue to look at how we can support local authorities, including Shetland Council, and work with them to improve connectivity and resilience in the transport sector

within our island communities. Of course, we will continue to invest in our northern isles services as we look to make sure that those who live in the northern isles, such as Shetland, have resilient ferry services.

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): I cannot say that I am impressed with the description in STPR2 of the Glasgow to Carlisle line, which runs through my constituency, as a “diversionary” route. It is key to the people of Ayrshire and beyond that the same level of investment is afforded to the line, so that more communities along the line can benefit from the economic and social advantages that rail travel brings—which are currently being enjoyed elsewhere in Scotland—such as electrification schemes and the reopening of local stations. Can the cabinet secretary give us some positive news for local people and confirm whether the line will be electrified in the near, short, medium or long term?

Michael Matheson: The member will be aware of the on-going work between Glasgow Central station and Barrhead—the electrification programme is being taken forward and is due to be completed, if I recall correctly, by the end of this year. In the next control period, we will be looking at further electrification of the network, including, potentially, down to the member's constituency.

As the member will be aware, we have given a commitment to decarbonise our rail network by 2035, which will involve looking at decarbonising routes and the electrification of routes across the network. However, any electrification programme must take into account new technologies that might come on to the market, such as hydrogen fuel cell-powered trains, which have the potential to operate on some parts of our existing rail network as well.

I assure the member that the route to his constituency will be part of our wider programme of work, over the next 10 years, to decarbonise Scotland's rail network.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): The cabinet secretary really has a nerve to stand up and regurgitate the same old lines—the same empty rhetoric—that we heard when he visited Stranraer more than four years ago. The people of the south-west, from every political background, are sick of the reviews, the reports and the broken commitments from this SNP Government, which has delivered only 0.05 per cent of the recent national infrastructure spend to the south-west.

Before the cabinet secretary reminds us, I say that we are all aware that infrastructure is devolved, but we also know that the UK

Government has provided £5 million for the A75, which is on the table to support a business plan that would rightly see the two Governments work together on a route that is of huge importance to the whole of the UK.

Will the cabinet secretary put his constitutional grievance to one side, if he is capable of doing that? No one in Galloway cares where the money comes from. When will the residents of Crocketford and Springholm be able to sleep safely in their beds, and when will they get the bypass? If the cabinet secretary wants to be honest and serious about delivering, he should tell us now when it will happen.

Michael Matheson: I recognise the member's long-standing interest in the issues on behalf of his constituents. He has often made the case very forcefully for investment in the south-west of Scotland. However, I am not entirely sure whether that £5 million figure is entirely correct, from the engagement that we have been having with the UK Government. It turns out that that so-called £5 million is £2 million—potentially £2 million—and that what it is to be used for is dependent on some feasibility work. Therefore, it is important that we are accurate and that there is honesty around this matter. I am sorry, but it appears that the member's figure is not correct—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Can we hear the cabinet secretary, please?

Michael Matheson: I am correcting the member because his figure is not correct, from the engagement that my colleague Jenny Gilruth has had with the UK Government on the issue. We are seeking further clarity on that.

As I set out in STPR2, there is a very clear commitment to seeing upgrades on both the A75 and the A77. As I mentioned, the details on taking forward the various recommendations that are set out in STPR2 will be set out in the delivery plan, and the delivery plan will be brought forward in the coming months. Sadly, it is delayed due to the challenges that we have had with the UK Government over the autumn period, which have had a direct impact on the—[*Interruption.*] Look, it is just a fact.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Excuse me—could we have less sedentary chit-chat? We need to hear the speaker who has the floor, which is the cabinet secretary.

Michael Matheson: It is just a fact that the budget process was delayed by the UK Government, and that had a direct impact on our budgetary preparation process, which then had an impact on our being able to take forward our delivery plan. Had that not happened, I would be in a position to publish the delivery plan alongside STPR2.

I hope that the member will take the reassurance that I have given him about our commitment to take that work forward over the next couple of months, so that he can see the detail and the timeframe.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can squeeze in the last two questions from members who have asked to speak if they are brief questions and we have answers to match.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): I welcome the STPR and the vision behind it, but I want to speak up for Scotland's strategic road network. One of the biggest and most costly impacts on our road network comes from lorries, and massive climate emissions come from lorries as well. How can STPR support a modal shift from road freight to rail freight?

Michael Matheson: It is important that we help to increase and expand rail freight. One of our recommendations in STPR2 is to look at increasing movements of freight on our rail network. As part of our grant scheme, we have provided some £25 million in ring-fenced funding specifically for rail freight for the period up to 2024. We are seeing the benefits of that being delivered right now, with the new Highland Spring rail freight facility at Blackford, which will remove at least 10 million lorry miles from Scotland's roads in the first 10 years. We want to see more of that, which is why STPR2 includes a recommendation to look at how we can increase the level of rail freight in the Scottish network.

Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP): Will improvements to the reliability of rural roads, such as the B829, be considered as part of STPR2, in order to improve accessibility and encourage economic growth in rural communities?

Michael Matheson: If I am correct, that is a road to Stronachlachar from Aberfoyle, in the member's constituency. It is a road that I have been very familiar with over many years. It has had many challenges with overflowing and so on over an extended period of time. However, it is a local road, so it is the responsibility of the local authority, and therefore any plans to take forward upgrading work on that particular road would be a matter for the local authority.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the minister's statement. I apologise to those additional members who asked to put a question—obviously, we have run out of time.

There will be a short pause before we move on to the next item of business.

Budget 2023-24 (Committees' Pre-budget Scrutiny)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-07602, in the name of Kenneth Gibson, on behalf of the Finance and Public Administration Committee, on the Scottish budget 2023-24. I invite members who wish to participate in the debate to press their request-to-speak button. I call Kenneth Gibson to speak to and move the motion on behalf of the Finance and Public Administration Committee.

14:57

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I am pleased to open this afternoon's debate on pre-budget scrutiny, on behalf of the Finance and Public Administration Committee.

The inclusion of this debate in the overall budget process was recommended by the budget process review group in 2017, with the aim of bringing greater transparency, influence and scrutiny to Scottish Government budget proposals. The debate also provides a welcome opportunity for conveners to set out how their committees have sought to influence the Scottish budget through their pre-budget reports, and for Scottish ministers to respond. That is why I am delighted to see that so many committee conveners will participate in the debate. I look forward to listening to their contributions, as well as to those of my committee colleagues and other colleagues. I will not touch on all our pre-budget deliberations; in closing the debate, the deputy convener of our committee, Daniel Johnson, will cover what I omit.

This year, the FPA Committee agreed to use the Scottish Government's resource spending review, which was published in May, to inform our pre-budget scrutiny. The review set out spending plans for the remainder of the parliamentary session, supporting the Scottish Government's ambitions from 2023-24 to 2026-27. Although it was not intended to provide fixed budgets, the review provides a clearer idea of the direction of travel for public finances, including public sector funding.

We focused our pre-budget scrutiny primarily on three spending review areas: the impact of the cost of living crisis on the Scottish budget 2023-24, proposals for public service reform, and how spending priorities might affect the delivery of national outcomes in the national performance framework. Our scrutiny was also informed by the Scottish Fiscal Commission's "Scotland's Economic and Fiscal Forecasts" and by "The Scottish Government's Medium Term Financial Strategy", which was published alongside

"Investing in Scotland's Future: Resource Spending Review" in May last year.

We thank our adviser, Professor Mairi Spowage, for her invaluable advice throughout the year. We are also grateful to all those who responded to our call for views, which ran between June and August, and to our witnesses for their evidence, which has helped to shape our findings.

However, with some notable exceptions, witnesses continue to emphasise the need for increased spending in their own portfolio areas and are reluctant to provide suggestions on where funding might be deprioritised, where additional revenue could be raised and what spending priorities should be. There is more often a willingness to assert that increased funding for their own budget area in the short term will lead to longer-term savings elsewhere in the future.

Pre-budget scrutiny came at a time when the cost of essential items such as food and energy was increasing faster than incomes, and inflation had recently hit a 40-year high. The Scottish Fiscal Commission's May forecasts stated:

"The Russian invasion of Ukraine, steeply rising energy prices and further global supply chain disruptions in China have led to a challenging economic outlook."

The United Kingdom faces the biggest annual fall in living standards since equivalent records began—7.1 per cent by the end of next year, according to the Office for Budget Responsibility—and just before we published our pre-budget report at the start of November, a third UK Prime Minister in as many months took office and serious concerns were emerging in relation to UK economic stability. In fact, economists and commentators had already spoken of the UK having entered recession.

In its 2022-23 budget, the Scottish Government made a series of savings in-year to identify allocations that could be used to fund cost of living support, including improved public sector pay offers. We heard in evidence from the Deputy First Minister last week that uncertainties remain on how it will balance the books for this financial year, with a sum of between £200 million and £500 million still to be found. It is concerning that there is still that level of uncertainty so late in the financial year, so any further information that ministers can provide today will be welcome.

The committee also notes the Scottish Government's expectation that it will not be in a position to carry over any resource into 2023-24, which will place additional pressures on public finances next year. We heard evidence that the cost of living crisis is impacting people from across society, from businesses to households, to voluntary bodies and to communities.

In our pre-budget report, we welcomed the Scottish Government's commitment to provide immediate support to those who are most in need. We were concerned about inflationary pressures persisting into the next financial year, however, and asked the Scottish Government to look further ahead at how immediate fixes over this winter might be extended into its budget for 2023-24. In responding, ministers pointed to the uprating of devolved benefits, including the early uprating and expansion of the Scottish child payment, continuation of the fuel insecurity fund and doubling of the Scottish child bridging payment as ways in which it would continue to support people through the cost of living crisis into 2023-24.

We heard compelling evidence that the crisis is having a disproportionate impact on women and asked how the Scottish Government could best support women through these challenging times. We also urged ministers to put in place robust and transparent processes to evaluate all policies and outcomes for their gender impacts. We hoped that that would better support committees in policy scrutiny decisions for their potential impact on women, including through evidence gathering.

In its response to the pre-budget report, the Scottish Government said that it was

“committed to ... mitigating ... the disproportionate impact of the cost of living crisis on women.”

It also said that it accepted

“the principle of integrating intersectional gender analysis into our policy making and are taking that forward as part of our wider work on equality and human rights budgeting.”

We have asked in our budget report for more details on exactly how that is being taken forward.

During pre-budget scrutiny, we heard different views on whether the Scottish Government should, in its 2023-24 budget, follow or diverge from the UK Government's income tax policy. In our budget report, which was published yesterday, we explored in more detail the Scottish Government's income tax plans for the next year, including the potential that negative behavioural impacts will reduce revenue, which was highlighted by the Scottish Fiscal Commission.

Where we continue to find common ground is on the need to increase productivity, wage growth and labour market participation in Scotland to bolster sustainable economic growth, including growing the tax base, and on the need for greater investment in research and development and greater support for innovation. Those issues are of particular interest to the committee and are ones that we continue to raise as part of our wider work, including in our forthcoming scrutiny of the Scottish Fiscal Commission's first sustainability report, which will be published in March.

The Scottish Government has pointed to its national strategy for economic transformation as the stimulus for addressing inactivity, low productivity and slow wage growth. We continue to seek more detail on how it will do that, along with information on how budgetary pressures will impact on delivery.

The decision to cut employability services in-year during 2022-23 was of particular concern to the committee, although we recognised that that was just one of many difficult decisions that had to be taken in order to fund public sector pay deals and to address the cost of living crisis. We asked the Scottish Government for the analysis that it had undertaken on the reduction in funding for employability services in order to understand any adverse impact, including on its ability to meet child poverty targets. I raised the matter directly with the First Minister at the Conveners Group in September. We thank the Deputy First Minister for the assessments that were carried out and we welcome the rise in employability funding in 2023-24.

A significant focus of the resource spending review was on public service reform. The review was intended to provide a

“fresh vision for our public services reform programme”

and to set out

“a coherent package of action that will drive progress over the life of the current parliament, improving outcomes while driving efficiency and value for money”.

Those proposals also formed a significant element of the committee's pre-budget scrutiny, and we asked stakeholders to provide their views on the Government's proposals to achieve reform through digitalisation, to maximise revenue through public sector innovation, to reform the public sector estate, to reform the public body landscape and to improve public procurement.

We noted in our pre-budget report that reform and efficiencies often require expenditure up front and time to deliver, and we invited the Government to confirm whether its plans to achieve savings by the end of the parliamentary session are realistic. The limited information that was provided in the Scottish Government's response did not give us sufficient confidence that its plans are achievable within that timeframe.

The resource spending review committed the Scottish Government to publishing initial outcomes and plans for its public service reform programme alongside the Scottish budget. In our pre-budget report, we asked that ministers develop detailed and transparent proposals that clearly set out priorities, funding, timescales and intended outcomes, as well as the potential impact on service delivery. Unfortunately, expected outcomes and reform plans were not published

with the budget and there was no explanation for that, other than the suggestion that work was ongoing. Officials are engaging with public bodies to initiate action in identifying opportunities to reduce overhead costs—for example, through rationalisation of estates and public bodies. We recorded our concern about that approach in our budget report and sought further detail in order that the Government could provide us with the assurance that we need that that work is on track and will improve public service effectiveness.

We recognise the challenges that the Scottish Government faces in identifying additional money to fund public sector pay rises in response to inflation. The committee noted in our pre-budget report that the Scottish Government is seeking to reduce the public sector head count over the rest of the parliamentary session to pre-Covid levels—from around 447,000 to 417,000. The First Minister's commitment to a policy of there being no compulsory redundancies in that regard is welcome. We recognise that this is an uncertain time for all concerned, so we have asked for assurances that the Scottish Government will take a partnership approach with the workforce and that it will be open and transparent on those difficult issues.

We also sought assurances that ministers will approach reducing the public sector headcount in a systematic, transparent and co-ordinated way, in tandem with the public service reform agenda, while minimising adverse effects on public service delivery. In response, the Scottish Government said that it has developed its proposition around targeted workforce growth in priority areas and that it is for individual public bodies to determine locally the target operating model for their workforce. Again, we believe that more information is required. We continue to pursue progress on public service reform, pay and headcount in our budget report, and we look forward to receiving more information from the Scottish Government on those issues, in due course.

Finally, I want to return to where I started my speech—the resource spending review. When it was published, the committee welcomed the certainty and transparency that it provides in relation to expected spend in future years, although some of the decisions that would have had to be taken in delivering what is in that report would have been very challenging. As was acknowledged by the Deputy First Minister in recent evidence to the committee, Scotland's economic and financial circumstances have changed dramatically since May. We therefore urge the Scottish Government to provide an update as soon as possible.

I now look forward to hearing colleagues' contributions and am pleased to move motion S6M-07602, which is in my name.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the pre-budget scrutiny undertaken by the Finance and Public Administration Committee, and other parliamentary committees.

15:09

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney): Today's debate is an important part of the Parliament's scrutiny of the Scottish budget, and I appreciate the engagement across the committees in preparation for the debate.

It has been a particularly challenging budget to develop. The war in Ukraine, the surge in the inflation rate and the damage to the public finances that was done by the mini-budget in September have created an exceptionally difficult landscape in which to develop and bring forward the Scottish budget. As a Government, we have had to make difficult choices, and the Parliament will have to consider and determine those choices in the course of the next few weeks.

A balance must be struck between the funding that is available and what it can deliver for the people of Scotland. We have actively chosen to increase the funding that is available to the Scottish budget through our fair and progressive approach to taxation. We have brought to the Parliament a budget that sets a different path for Scotland, which prioritises the elimination of child poverty, the transition to net zero and the sustainability and effectiveness of our public services.

The Finance and Public Administration Committee's report recognises the nature and scale of the financial challenges that we continue to grapple with in the current financial year and that set a challenging context for the year ahead. As I made clear in my evidence to the committee earlier this month, I take seriously the points that the committee's convener made in his speech and in the report about the undesirability of there not being a path to balance the budget at this stage in the year. I assure the Parliament that that is not for want of trying and that it is a measure of the scale of the challenge that we face because of the factors that I recounted earlier in my speech. I further assure the Parliament that we are working to address the issues in the time that is available to us.

We have limited fiscal powers, so we have had no option but to reduce our spending in order to meet the pressures on our budget, not least the £700 million of additional funding that we have allocated for public sector pay, which makes a

substantial contribution to assisting public sector employees to deal with the cost of living crisis that we face.

We recognise that public sector pay is an important issue to the Parliament. I explained in my budget statement that I was not publishing a public sector pay policy because of the uncertainty about the outlook for inflation and the need to conclude some pay deals in the current year. We can still make progress on pay discussions for 2023-24. Indeed, the Scottish Government continues to engage on pay issues with trade unions and public sector employers. Along with the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, I have been actively involved in negotiations relating to the agenda for change groupings that we are trying to resolve for 2023-24.

I appreciate that there is a wide range of views across the chamber on what the budget should support, and the debate offers an opportunity for a wider conversation. I look forward with interest to hearing the perspective from a range of committees in members' contributions to the debate.

I thank the Finance and Public Administration Committee for its pre-budget scrutiny report and stage 1 report and for its acknowledgment of the wide-ranging challenges that the Scottish budget faces. I will carefully consider the recommendations in the report and will reply to the committee in writing in due course.

For the 2023-24 Scottish budget, I have carefully balanced the growing asks against the funding that is available. The budget recognises that we must take action now to enable us to overcome the even greater fiscal challenges that lie ahead. Our approach is set out in our medium-term financial strategy, and we continue to take steps to improve that each year in response to the challenges that we face. Further updates in relation to the implications of the current environment and the different environment to which the convener referred will be set out by the Government in due course—that is likely to be in the medium-term financial strategy.

Critical for the Scottish Government is our continued commitment to ensuring that our public services provide the support that people and communities need, improving outcomes and reducing inequalities while remaining fiscally sustainable. The UK Government's financial plans will make that incredibly challenging, with the funding outlook for the later years of its spending review period looking increasingly bleak. For those and other reasons, I have taken decisions to increase the higher and top rates of taxation in the next year in order to boost the revenue that is available to the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament to address those questions.

Reform of our public services is vital to ensure their sustainability. We have already pursued those issues with public bodies and set out our approach, which is built on joining up service delivery to direct resources towards more person-centred services and, in doing so, make better use of resources.

Secondly, we will undertake a rigorous review of the public body landscape, the work that public bodies do and how resources are used to improve outcomes. That work is not easy and will involve a whole-system approach, which we know will take time to deliver the results that we require.

Thirdly, we are expanding the utilisation of digital technology in the delivery of our public services.

Finally, we will carefully manage public sector employment, in dialogue with public bodies and with our trade union partners, who must be at the heart of dialogue on all such questions.

Change happens when we all buy into and contribute to a vision of effective, sustainable and person-centred services that is both achievable and ambitious, and that will be the focus of the public service reform work that the Government undertakes.

I place on record my thanks to all the committees for their scrutiny work on the budget. In the time that is available to me, I will reflect on a number of the issues that they raised, although I will come back to that in my closing speech, when I have heard from committees about some of the issues that we can further address.

The Economy and Fair Work Committee acknowledged the current challenging economic circumstances and expressed interest in the financial support that we intend to provide for a range of economic and business areas, including enterprise agencies, tourism and the hospitality sector. The 2023-24 Scottish budget maximises the support that we can deliver for businesses through the budget directly and through non-domestic rate support mechanisms.

The Health, Social Care and Sport Committee acknowledged that the scale of the financial and operational challenge across the health and social care sector is unprecedented. That is why the 2023-24 Scottish budget will provide more than £19 billion of investment in health and social care. That is an increase of more than £1 billion, which has been made possible due to the additional revenue that we have raised through our fair and progressive taxation system. As a result, we are exceeding our commitment to pass on all the health and social care resource consequentials to the health and social care system.

The Social Justice and Social Security Committee offered views on a range of social justice and poverty issues. The Scottish Government takes those issues seriously, and I hope that our response in the budget to those significant issues is commensurate with the seriousness of the issues that the committee put to us.

We have taken exceptional steps to support Scotland through the cost crisis and, by the end of March 2023, we will have invested about £3 billion in a range of measures to support households. In addition, we are investing £442 million in delivering the Scottish child payment, which is the most ambitious child poverty reduction measure in the UK. We hope that that measure, along with the uprating in April 2023 of all other Scottish benefits by the September consumer prices index figure, demonstrates that we are providing a comprehensive package that will help us to eliminate child poverty in Scotland.

The Education, Children and Young People Committee raised the important issues of colleges, universities and early learning and childcare. The education and skills resource budget for next year will increase by £132 million, to more than £3 billion, to enable us to address many of those issues.

The Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee focused its pre-budget scrutiny on affordable housing. The Government has put in place investment to support the continuation of the long-term affordable housing programme—next year, we will make available more than £750 million for affordable housing. The local government settlement has been enhanced through a cash increase of £570 million, or 4.5 per cent, which represents a real-terms increase of 1.3 per cent.

The Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee sought evidence on topics including the fair fares review and bus support, heat in buildings and the joint budget review. We have set out a range of measures, including the investment over the course of the parliamentary session of more than £1.8 billion in heat and energy efficiency, to enable us to properly address the challenges that the committee put to us. In addition, as we have set out on previous occasions, we are expanding the fuel insecurity fund.

In conclusion, I highlight the work that we have taken forward with our recent announcement of the islands deal. We have set out commitments to support our rural and island communities, and the rural affairs budget reflects those challenges.

I look forward to hearing responses from committees and will reflect on those issues in my closing speech. I stress the importance of

ensuring that we set a budget that utilises the resources that are available to us, but I make it clear that some very difficult choices had to be made to get us to the position that we are in. I look forward to hearing the views of committees as we take forward our constructive engagement on the Scottish budget.

15:20

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): As convener of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee, I am pleased to contribute to this debate on the budget. To inform our pre-budget scrutiny, the committee issued a call for written evidence, which received a total of 20 responses. We took oral evidence from selected witnesses on 20 September 2022 and wrote to the cabinet secretary with our recommendations on 27 October. I am grateful for the cabinet secretary's written response of 15 December and his appearance before the committee on 10 January 2023 to answer questions about the budget.

The evidence that we received highlighted concerns about the unprecedented financial pressures that our health and social care services face. Those pressures have been exacerbated by the spiralling cost of living, which is having a damaging effect on the wellbeing of our citizens and on our health and social care workforce, and by the vastly increased cost of running the national health service because of fuel costs and inflation.

Witnesses also highlighted the long-term impacts that the Covid-19 pandemic has inflicted on the physical and mental health of the Scottish population and on the wellbeing of the NHS workforce. That will require on-going financial support in the years ahead. Long Covid continues to impact the health and social care workforce, unpaid carers, those receiving care and the wider population. That, too, will continue to come at a considerable cost as we find out what treatments might be needed in future.

However, the impact of the pandemic has not been universally negative. Many of those who responded to our call for evidence were keen to highlight how positive experiences of the pandemic, and of how the pandemic was managed, have helped to drive innovations in healthcare delivery.

One of our recommendations to the Scottish Government is that it must continue to foster a culture of innovation in health and social care. We must ensure that the improvements in the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery that were brought about by the ways in which our health and social care workers managed the pandemic are embedded and built on. For that to happen, we must ensure that we are properly

monitoring and evaluating the cost-saving benefits of innovation and that we are learning lessons. As one of our witnesses told the committee, encouraging innovation includes giving practitioners the confidence to try new approaches.

My committee has long asserted that there are persistent and substantial gaps in the available data on various aspects of health and social care. Stakeholders who contributed to our pre-budget scrutiny told us that that impedes budget tracking and the assessment of spending against defined outcomes, meaning that certain outcomes might not be measured at all. Although we recognise the £1 million uplift in health spending and the increase in pay for NHS staff, it is vital that, given the Scottish Government's constrained budgetary environment, we have the data to accurately measure the impact of spending against those outcomes and to target finite resources as effectively as possible.

Many of those who contributed to our pre-budget scrutiny highlighted the negative effect of single-year budgets on long-term financial planning and said that that can hamper efforts to prioritise resources towards preventative spending and to meeting NHS Scotland's stated ambition

"to become a service which is both environmentally and socially sustainable".

As the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities wrote in its submission to the committee,

"Overall, there remains a continued focus on input and output measures rather than outcomes when it comes to public spending. This drives behaviour and spending in ways that are not necessarily best value."

We fully appreciate the immense strain that our health and social care services are currently under as they face immediate and acute demands that are, as I have said, unprecedented. However, prioritising preventative spending and net zero investment is a nettle that we know we need to grasp if we are to stand any chance of putting health and social care finances on a more sustainable footing in the long term.

The committee has called for clarity on when the Scottish Government will bring forward an updated medium-term financial framework for health and social care. We recognise that no budgets are set through that framework, but, nonetheless, publishing it would give health and social care decision makers greater certainty and confidence, enabling them to plan funding in the longer term and give greater priority to the preventative spending that we know will unlock better health outcomes in the future.

In our letter to the cabinet secretary, the committee also emphasised the importance of taking a whole-system approach to assessing the

health impact of non-health spending. I commend the cabinet secretary's commitment in his response to

"working ... with Public Health Scotland ... to explore better ways to embed the consideration of health issues into decision-making at national and local level".

We also want to recognise the cross-portfolio working on tackling the poverty-related determinants of ill health, which represents a real step change in approach.

I note the forthcoming health impact assessment of the population health impacts of the cost of living. The committee has repeatedly made the case for more systematic use of health impact assessments, including as part of the budget process. I hope that that publication will provide an exemplar for the increasingly systematic application of a "health in all policies" approach to future budgets.

There can be no doubting the huge financial challenges that the health and social care sectors face, but if we are to achieve the goal of placing health and social care finances on that sustainable long-term footing, we as policy makers must retain a focus on longer-term planning, preventative healthcare and an integrated whole-system approach, fostering innovation, effectively measuring our progress and improving long-term outcomes.

15:27

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): I rise to speak on behalf of the Education, Children and Young People Committee. For our budget scrutiny, we chose to look at both ends of the educational spectrum: early learning and childcare, and further and higher education.

August 2021 marked the introduction of the duty on local authorities to secure 1,140 hours of early learning and childcare for all three and four-year-olds and eligible two-year-olds. Members will know that local authorities have a dual role: they are ELC providers and they commission services from private, voluntary and independent nurseries and childminders.

Since the roll-out of the 1,140 hours, PVI providers have faced significant difficulties in recruitment. The Scottish Childminding Association told us that, during ELC expansion, the sector has lost more than 1,400 childminders. The National Day Nurseries Association described to us a crisis in the ELC workforce caused by the expansion in local authority employment and the pandemic.

The issues that have been raised with us include the rates of pay for providers differing between local authorities, as the Scottish

Government guidance does not set out a specific rate for local authorities to pay. The committee has recommended that a mapping exercise be carried out, because we want to find out what hourly rates are being paid to staff across local authorities and the PVI sector. We also want to know the extent to which staff are moving from jobs in the PVI sector into local authorities and the monetary value of the in-kind support that is provided to the PVI sector.

We found that the rates that are paid to the PVI and childminding sectors vary between local authorities. For three to five-year-olds, they range from £5 an hour in Orkney to £6.40 an hour in West Lothian. We found that different rates apply for two-year-olds and that different rates are paid to childminders in some local authorities.

The committee is aware that a small number of local authorities do not provide an uplift in funding to the PVI sector for two-year-olds, despite the increased cost of that provision. We were told that underfunding is an on-going concern for many of those in the PVI sector, with several now operating at a loss. We also heard that the Scottish Government is reviewing the overall process for setting sustainable rates. We look forward to receiving information about the financial health of the sector and about the critical issue of staff pay, terms and conditions.

As part of the inquiry, we learned that, although some two-year-olds are eligible for funded places, uptake has been low, at around only 13 per cent in 2020-21. Local authorities have struggled to identify eligible families. However, we were pleased to learn recently that new data-sharing arrangements will allow local authorities to target information to eligible households. We all hope that that will lead to an increase in uptake.

The choice of where and when children access funded ELC is very important to parents and care givers. Private providers can offer greater flexibility than local authority-run settings. That flexibility is essential to those who do not work around traditional office hours, such as healthcare workers, albeit not only to them.

Cross-border provision is available between a small number of local authorities. We heard some evidence on that, from Argyll and Bute. That flexibility has been helpful for parents who live and work in different local authority areas. Local authorities are expected to work together to resolve cross-border issues and the Scottish Government has offered to look at what further work might be necessary to allow families across Scotland to access cross-border solutions.

Another sector that offers vital services to people across Scotland is our colleges. They do fantastic work, and we all want them to thrive and to deliver the skilled workforce that is essential to

growing Scotland's economy. We heard about the significant funding challenges that are faced by our colleges. The Scottish Funding Council said that the sector forecasts an underlying operating deficit in every academic year to 2026-27. Staff costs make up a high proportion of colleges' overall costs, and the sector projects significant staff reductions, of around 200 to 300 full-time equivalent staff members in each of the next five years.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): I realise that Sue Webber is speaking for the committee. Is it the committee's thinking that we should give a bit more to the colleges and a bit less to universities?

Sue Webber: I would hate to pre-empt our college inquiry report. I thank Mr Mason for his question, but, if he does not mind, we will wait until later in the year to see what that says.

Although there has been an increase of £26 million in the colleges resource budget for the coming year, that is only 0.6 per cent in real terms. It is important that colleges find out what that means for baseline funding in future years.

In 2022, Audit Scotland highlighted that capital funding has

"consistently fallen short of the level needed"

for maintenance in colleges. Furthermore, given that the ability of colleges to raise funds is limited, the committee is concerned that they will not be able to meet their net zero targets by 2045. We believe that an assessment of the current position and an investment strategy should be completed as a matter of urgency.

I will speak briefly about universities. Our universities have a fabulous reputation across the world. We welcome the students who come from across the world and we recognise the cultural diversity that they bring. However, Scotland's funding model for universities is now structurally reliant on international fees; that source of revenue is forecast to overtake Scottish Government funding as a percentage of the sector's total income, by 2023-24. We have asked the Scottish Government how it plans to ensure long-term sustainability and to mitigate the risks of reliance on international student fee income.

In closing, I am sure that members would like to join me in thanking the staff who delivered vital services to children and young people across Scotland.

15:34

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I welcome the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs

and Culture Committee. We focused our pre-budget scrutiny on the culture spending portfolio. I thank all those who attended our round tables and who submitted evidence to the committee.

Although culture spend represents a relatively small proportion of the budget, the return on investment in culture, heritage and the arts is significant. Culture enriches our lives and provides a platform for innovation. It is of strategic national importance, from Edinburgh's festivals, which attract more than 4 million people to our capital each year, to Scotland's screen sector, which contributes £500 million to the economy and is set to become a £1 billion industry by 2030. Our grass-roots cultural organisations work in communities up and down the country to change lives every day. Scotland's cultural heritage is intrinsic to who we are as a nation. It plays a crucial role in how we market and position ourselves globally—Burns night, which was last night, is just one example of that.

Over the past year, the budgetary challenges that Scotland's culture sector faces have become much more acute. The evidence that the committee heard was clear and sobering. The committee found that the culture sector is experiencing significant financial pressures, which are, as Iain Munro of Creative Scotland said, driven by a "perfect storm" of reduced income generation, increased operating costs and longer-term budgetary pressures. That comes as the sector struggles to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic and has been compounded by the cost of living crisis that is affecting us all—indeed, we heard that the cost of living crisis presents

"an even greater short and medium-term challenge"

to the culture sector than the pandemic did.

Let us not forget that culture was among the sectors that were hardest hit by the pandemic. We were told that the emergency support that the Scottish Government provided had been essential in helping many cultural organisations to stay afloat. Now, however, the sector's already fragile recovery from the pandemic is in doubt, as cultural organisations are vulnerable to significantly increased operating costs. That has followed on from longer-term budget pressures for the culture sector, which go back to 2010. In its session 5 report "Putting Artists In The Picture: A Sustainable Arts Funding System For Scotland", the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee pointed to a

"real-terms reduction in funding for the arts".

During the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee's evidence sessions, Sir John Leighton, who is director general of the National Galleries of Scotland, said that

"we face a funding challenge the like of which I have never before witnessed or, indeed, imagined."

He made it clear that the roots of the challenges

"lie in patterns of funding across a longer period".—[*Official Report, Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee*, 29 September 2022; c 24.]

Creative Scotland's core revenue budget has reduced in real terms by approximately £13.1 million since 2010-11. The impact of the longer-term pressures, combined with further fiscal pressure arising from the recent resource spending review, featured as a key theme in the evidence that the committee received. If the spending review plans prove accurate, funding for culture and major events will fall in real terms by an estimated 4.7 per cent by 2026, despite being protected in cash terms.

This year's budget settlement for Historic Environment Scotland and the National Galleries of Scotland was welcomed and was said to provide a "year-long breathing space". However, the rationalising of estates, which Mr Gibson spoke to earlier, is a very different challenge for Historic Environment Scotland than it is for other organisations. Funding for Creative Scotland is down by more than 10 per cent, but that will be offset by national lottery income and reserves while the Scottish Government faces budget constraints. Although we welcomed hearing the cabinet secretary's reasoning for that decision at committee, it is not recurring money and therefore not a long-term solution.

The committee recognises that other areas of the budget are also under considerable pressure, so there are no easy budgetary solutions in tackling the considerable difficulties that the culture sector faces. However, there must now be an increased urgency to accelerate innovative solutions to the funding challenges that culture faces. That includes the development of additional public and private revenue streams for the sector.

The committee wants progress to be made on establishing a percentage for the arts scheme, which has been consistently proposed by our community and third sector organisations. We should also consider how the culture sector could benefit from the proposed transient visitor levy, given the role that culture plays in attracting visitors to Scotland.

The committee has discussed at great length the mainstreaming of culture across portfolios. We would like to see consideration of investment in culture from other budget lines and a reappraisal of what is considered to be health spending. That should include recognising the contribution that preventative spend in the arts makes towards health and wellbeing—whether that is through projects such as choirs for sufferers of dementia or

chronic obstructive pulmonary disease or craft classes to tackle isolation, stigma and mental health problems. On the Scottish Government's aim of redirecting funding towards demonstrable preventative approaches, we need to see progress.

The committee has made all those recommendations previously and, in the face of the "perfect storm" that I described earlier, we reiterate them because the evidence that we have received suggests that a strategic approach is still lacking when it comes to mainstreaming culture. To quote Sir John Leighton, the ambition to embed culture in health and wellbeing is

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

The committee welcomes the cabinet secretary's reassurances that closer cross-portfolio relationships are being developed, but we need to see that in action.

I turn to multiyear funding—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that you are going to have to wind up, Ms Adamson. You have had seven minutes.

Clare Adamson: I apologise, Presiding Officer. I shall leave my remarks there.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I appreciate that. I am afraid that we are quite tight for time.

15:41

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): At this time last year, the Economy and Fair Work Committee's focus was on support for business to recover from the pandemic, encourage investment and create good employment opportunities. We all acknowledged the challenging economic circumstances that existed at that time. However, as we look ahead to the next financial year, it seems that circumstances will be no less challenging.

The committee heard that, for some sectors, the economic outlook is worse than it was last year and the need for business support is even more urgent. I will focus on two sectors—tourism and hospitality.

In the lead-up to Christmas, the Scottish Tourism Alliance told the committee:

"From a business point of view, everybody would say that we are in a worse place now than we were last year, without question."

In the hospitality sector, wage inflation and the rising costs of food and drink have been continuing concerns, but increased energy costs have

"dwarfed the problems that the businesses were experiencing".—[*Official Report, Economy and Fair Work Committee*, 5 October 2022; c 26, 28.]

We know that tourism can provide sustainable economic growth across Scotland, but the sector is under severe pressure. Two of the committee's key budget recommendations to the Scottish Government were to work with the Scottish tourism recovery group to identify the best business support for the sector, specifically including further business rates support; and to protect VisitScotland's international promotion budget, because such expenditure is critical to maximising income for the sector in 2023-24.

The Scottish Government's written response to the committee, and the Deputy First Minister's evidence to it last week, set out the measures that the Scottish Government will take to help all businesses, but they do not include targeted support specifically for the tourism and hospitality sectors. The Scottish Government's plans to freeze the poundage and create transitional reliefs, together with the small business bonus scheme—all of which will benefit some properties in the hospitality sector—are welcome. However, the committee was strongly in favour of the tourism and hospitality sectors being prioritised for business rates support. We are disappointed that enhanced targeted support for those sectors is not on the table, given the concerns that have been expressed.

Similarly, in response to the committee's call to protect VisitScotland's international promotion budget, the Scottish Government's written response did not provide comfort. At our evidence session last week, the Deputy First Minister sought to provide assurances that joint promotional work could be undertaken with a range of partners, which would create efficiencies, and that there had been a shift in the direction of digital marketing.

The committee acknowledges that VisitScotland is effective with its marketing spend, but the committee's view remains that it would be short sighted to cut the budget for international promotion. There is a real opportunity to bring to Scotland spending power that would support our tourism and hospitality sectors. There is strong evidence that international visitors stay longer and spend more in local economies. Investment in that area brings financial rewards and supports regional economies—an opportunity that has been recognised in Ireland, which has announced a £62 million investment in tourism attractions. The committee does not underestimate the financial pressures that the Government faces, but we want opportunities to be grasped, and we would support the readjustment of other funds in that area towards international tourism.

The second key committee recommendation relates to the Scottish Government's commitment to establish a women's business centre. The committee and many stakeholders welcomed the fact that the programme for government earmarked £50 million, over the current session of Parliament, to establish such a centre. We know that women experience difficulties in accessing financial support from traditional sources and that there is a lack of gender-disaggregated data on women's businesses and procurement activity. We also know that women tend to run smaller businesses; if there are problems in accessing finance, any business will lack the structural capital to grow or expand trade, get the right networks in place and take advantage of opportunities.

In our pre-budget letter, the committee noted that there is significant opportunity from enhancing women's contribution to Scotland's economy. We asked for the establishment of the women's business centre to be prioritised in this year's budget. The committee is therefore disappointed that there seems to have been no discernible progress.

In December, we asked the Deputy First Minister how much of the earmarked £50 million would be spent in the coming financial year. In response, we were referred to the review that Ana Stewart was undertaking on widening access to entrepreneurship for women. The committee was told that long-term funding decisions have not yet been made. The Ana Stewart review was commissioned last April and, at that time, it was reported that full findings and recommendations would be available in September. However, we still await them.

The response that the committee received from the Government sounded rather conditional. The committee is convinced of the benefits of a women's business centre, and we want that to be progressed. That would be another good example of the Government being able to grasp opportunities. We know that there is so much to be gained from women having greater involvement in the economy.

The committee identified two other spending priorities for the coming year. We want a focus on skills development and on incentivising workplace learning for the engineering and manufacturing sectors in particular. We also want to see investment to support expansion of those sectors, which have a buoyant export potential; that presents an opportunity to focus on green energy transition support.

I will close on employability spend. Along with the Finance and Public Administration Committee, we have concerns about that. At the start of September, the Deputy First Minister announced

that savings of at least £500 million were needed, which included £53 million of employability support spending.

Employability services support those who wish to work but face barriers to doing so. There can be many reasons why some people find it difficult to get into work. The Fraser of Allander Institute has published a good analysis of employability spend and why it is important.

At the Conveners Group meeting with the First Minister, and again last week, when the Deputy First Minister was at the Economy and Fair Work Committee, I sought clarification on that reduction. The committee was told that it involved the removal of a projected increase to planned expenditure, and not a reduction to any spend on programmes that are being delivered.

The committee understands that savings have to be found. We note the assurances that were given that capacity remains in existing employability programmes to take on new programme entrants, but the committee will wish to monitor that. We are taking evidence on the disability employment gap, and we remain concerned that the impact of the reduction is removing opportunity from people who, while they may be furthest from the workplace, not only deserve to be included in our workforce and society but have a valuable contribution to make to Scotland's economy.

15:48

Siobhian Brown (Ayr) (SNP): It is my pleasure to speak on behalf of the COVID-19 Recovery Committee on our pre-budget scrutiny work. I thank all those who gave evidence to the committee and responded to our call for views, which informed our letter to the Government in advance of the publication of the budget documents in December. I know that stage 1 of the Budget (Scotland) (No 2) Bill is coming up, but I think that it is important that we have this debate today to hear how the pre-budget scrutiny work of committees has helped to influence and shape the Scottish Government's budget.

Our committee agreed to focus its scrutiny on the on-going costs associated with the pandemic, as set out in the Covid-19 strategic framework, and on how the Scottish Government has planned to fund its Covid recovery strategy. We were interested in the read-across between the strategic documents and the Scottish Government's other fiscal documents such as the resource spending review, the medium-term financial strategy and the "Equality and Fairer Scotland Budget Statement 2022-23".

Before I go on to talk about our pre-budget work, I would like to say something. Although we

are, thankfully, no longer in an emergency situation, for a lot of people, Covid is not over. That includes in particular those who have suffered loss and those who are trying to cope with long Covid, and I offer my sympathies to them. Those people are always at the forefront of our minds in our work on pre-budget scrutiny and on the recovery strategy and the strategic framework, with no exception.

In its pre-budget work, the committee heard evidence on three main themes: Covid recovery and the cost crisis; on-going Covid and pandemic preparedness associated with the strategic framework; and the outcomes-based budgeting and policy evaluation associated with the recovery strategy. The committee also touched on the wellbeing economy and considered the read-across between the Scottish Government's strategic documents and how they support the Government's stated aim of achieving a wellbeing economy. I will take those themes in turn.

First, on Covid recovery and the cost crisis, we asked the Government to clarify whether budgetary and inflationary pressures had impacted on its priorities and its ability to deliver on the outcomes as set out in the Covid recovery strategy. As we have already heard in the debate, the Government has confirmed that the cost crisis has indeed had an impact, but it is still committed to making progress towards the shared Covid recovery strategy outcomes. The response to our pre-budget letter also highlighted that the recovery strategy will run up to September 2023.

We asked the Deputy First Minister about that last week, when he came to give evidence on the budget, and he explained that the aim is to mainstream Covid spend across all portfolios. I fully expect the COVID-19 Recovery Committee to be involved in ensuring that that mainstreaming is done effectively.

We also called for more clarity and transparency on funding directed at achieving the priorities and outcomes that are set out in the recovery strategy, and more detail on the evaluation and effectiveness of those funding allocations. I was pleased that the Government agreed that budget transparency is important. Its response highlighted its commitment to the delivery of the national outcomes as set out in the national performance framework and the fact that its budget was set accordingly. This is an area of continued interest to the committee, and I will talk more about it later.

Turning to the on-going Covid costs and the pandemic preparedness associated with the strategic framework, we considered the report of the standing committee on pandemic preparedness and its recommendations, and looked at the budgetary implications of the on-going cost of dealing with Covid. We asked for an

assurance that the Government would commit additional resources to implement the strategic framework, if that was required to respond to a new variant of concern or a mutation in the future.

That point was made by a number of witnesses, and the Government has said that it remains alert to the threat that is posed by potential new Covid variants. It also pointed to the plans published by Public Health Scotland that set out the processes that will be undertaken to identify and assess any future risk.

We also heard about the importance of funding the on-going activities in relation to vaccinations, surveillance, testing and personal protective equipment, and were reassured by the Government's commitment to allocate funds for those measures.

On-going surveillance, in particular, was an issue that we focused on and have since explored further. We wanted to understand how the waste water surveillance played a major part in identifying Covid outbreaks during the pandemic, and how that, and genomic sequencing, can continue to be used in the event of any further outbreak.

We looked at what future investment might be needed in surveillance measures and genomic sequencing for the on-going Covid-19 response and future pandemic preparedness. I am sure that members from all parties would agree that we do not ever want to be in a position in which we are unable to respond to another variant that emerges. It is important that, despite the current fiscal pressures, the Government allocates appropriate funding to pandemic preparedness and on-going surveillance measures.

We heard that good preparedness measures require a baseline level of funding and that project funding is not sustainable in terms of recruitment. With regard to the learning around PPE, we heard that stocks should be actively used rather than being warehoused.

I will turn briefly to the outcomes-based budget and policy evaluation, which is an issue that is of continued interest to us. In considering the funded policies that are contained in the recovery strategy, we were keen to know how the success or otherwise of certain policies can influence future policies and Government budgets. We explored the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Covid-19 recovery dashboard, which was developed to monitor how different countries are performing in the context of recovery. While giving evidence, the Deputy First Minister acknowledged that one of the challenges in deciding public expenditure priorities is assessing the most effective use of public expenditure at any given moment.

In light of the evidence that the committee heard, we recommended that the Government consider the OECD Covid-19 recovery dashboard and explore whether Scotland should adopt a similar approach to monitoring its recovery from the pandemic. Indeed, we considered the OECD dashboard in more detail just last week in advance of our session with the Deputy First Minister. In response, the Government again referred to the national performance framework and its similarities with the dashboard as a tool for measuring recovery through the stated outcomes relating to Scotland's economy, environment and wellbeing.

Finally on the wellbeing economy—this will have been of interest to other committees—we heard differing views on what exactly constitutes a wellbeing economy and that it is not clear how the national performance framework is used as a policy decision-making tool to help to deliver a wellbeing economy.

I will conclude. It is worth reiterating that one of the core objectives of the budget process is to improve transparency and raise public understanding and awareness of the budget. I believe that our pre-budget scrutiny has achieved that objective in relation to Covid spend.

15:55

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): It is my pleasure to contribute to the debate in my capacity as convener of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. The committee's pre-budget scrutiny this year focused primarily on the budget for the affordable housing supply programme. I will touch on that scrutiny, but I also want to focus on the work that the committee has undertaken on the predicament of local government budgets and the challenges ahead for local government.

In recent months, the committee has held evidence sessions on the interrelated issues of budget allocations for local government, the new deal for local government and the local governance review. The committee is yet to draw any conclusions on those matters, but I want to highlight some of the key issues arising out of those sessions.

To begin with, however, I will reflect on our work on the funding for the affordable housing supply programme. As I said at the outset, that was the focus of our pre-budget scrutiny, but we also held sessions on the issue earlier in the parliamentary session—and we will continue to do so as we move through it. Each time that we take evidence on the issue, we find that the challenges that the housing sector faces are that bit more severe than they were the previous time that we took evidence

on it. In particular, the costs of construction appear to continue to rise each time that we explore them with stakeholders.

We note that, although the capital grant budget for the affordable housing supply programme has been reduced, that reduction has to an extent been mitigated by an increase in financial transactions funding. That said, as the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government recognised in her evidence to the committee, the increasing cost of construction means that that investment does not deliver the same returns that it once did.

In the context of the existing grant funding regime, the prospect of meeting the Scottish Government's target for building affordable homes seems increasingly remote at the moment. The committee recognises that, to meet those targets, there needs to be a focus on innovative financing methods. We welcome the Scottish Government's recognition of that need and its establishment of an innovative finance steering group. The committee is keen to be kept up to date on the work of that group, and it encourages the Scottish Government to ensure that that work is progressed as a matter of urgency.

We also recognise that the pressures on social landlords are not limited to the delivery of new stock, but that they extend to the investment required to decarbonise their stock as well as to maintaining that stock. In this parliamentary session, the committee will continue to explore how social landlords meet those competing priorities in the current financial climate.

Lastly on housing, I emphasise that, in investing in affordable housing, we must ensure that we are building homes that meet the varied and complex needs of all of Scotland's people and that placemaking objectives are being achieved. It should not simply be a case of delivering housing numbers alone.

As I said at the beginning of my speech, I also want to look at the committee's exploration of the funding challenges that local government faces. Each day seems to bring yet more news of seemingly insurmountable problems to be faced by local government. Among other things, councils have to face the challenges of pay inflation and living wage costs; costs associated with Covid-19 recovery; energy inflation; non-pay inflation, including costs of materials, construction costs and contract inflation; and demand for, and price sensitivity of, chargeable services and the related impact on income from fees and charges.

There is universal recognition that local government does not currently have the fiscal levers to meet all those challenges. In that context, we have been exploring the potential impact of a

new deal between the Scottish Government and local government, including the Government's commitment to introducing a fiscal framework, as well as fiscal empowerment issues in the local governance review.

Local government and the Scottish Government reaching agreement on a new relationship will be central to enabling local government to respond to the challenge that it faces. We welcome the ambitions of the new deal. The programme for government envisaged a new deal which would enable local and national government to work together

“to achieve better outcomes for people”,

to balance

“greater flexibility over financial arrangements with improved accountability”,

to provide

“certainty over inputs, outcomes and assurance, alongside scope to innovate and improve services,”

and to recognise

“the critical role played by local authorities in tackling the climate emergency, for example through delivering ... heat and buildings, waste, active travel and nature restoration goals.”

We took evidence from council leaders before Christmas and, in particular, they stressed the importance of multiyear settlements so that councils can continue to provide services and meet new and emerging needs. They also emphasised the need for increased financial flexibilities, including more fiscal powers to allow councils to meet local needs. It seems conceivable that the new deal as currently envisaged could provide the certainty of funding and financial flexibility that is sought.

This year, as in every year, our scrutiny of the budget was dominated by the disagreement between COSLA and the Scottish Government on whether there has been an increase in funding to local government and what proportion of the funding settlement is ring fenced or directed. It is critical that any new deal must provide greater clarity on such matters.

It was originally envisaged that the new deal would be in place for the new financial year. The cabinet secretary told the committee that it would take a few more months, but that efforts to reach an agreement would be “turbocharged”. It is critical that we get this right, so taking longer and reaching a better agreement has to be welcomed. In saying that, this cannot drag on for years to come. The predicament of local government is such that a long delay will not be sustainable. The local governance review is nearly six years old. The new deal cannot go down the same trajectory.

We look forward to scrutinising the new deal in the coming months.

We also look forward to scrutinising the upcoming tourist levy bill. As a committee, we are keen to explore how local authorities can raise more of their own revenue, while recognising that core funding from the Scottish Government will still be essential to local authorities meeting the challenges that they face.

Finally, certainty about funding, flexibility in the use of funding and increased revenue raising will not in themselves answer all the challenges faced by local government. In introducing the recent Accounts Commission local government financial bulletin, William Moyes said:

“If they are to find a safe path through the difficult times ahead, councils need to focus more on service reform”,

based on strong engagement with communities. As a committee, we recognise that we are now 12 years on from the Christie commission. As much as a new deal is needed, so too is service reform, and we look forward to playing our part in driving that change.

16:03

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): I am pleased to speak in the debate as convener of the Criminal Justice Committee. I thank the committee clerks for their support during the budget scrutiny process and I thank all the members of the committee, who worked collegiately together during it. I would also like to thank the cabinet secretary for his attendance at committee on 23 December last year to give evidence as part of that process.

The justice spending portfolio covers the important work of our police and fire services, our prisons and courts, and many other key bodies which are critical to the safety of the public, such as third sector charities. It is for those reasons that the committee was concerned to read the resource spending review of May last year, which proposed flat-cash settlements for the years ahead. The Scottish Parliament information centre estimated that that would mean that resource spending in our remit could fall in real terms by £102 million, and that capital spending might also decrease in real terms by £5.2 million.

For individual bodies, such as Police Scotland, the Scottish Prison Service and the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service, we had been looking at real-terms reductions of nearly 8 per cent, according to SPICe. Clearly, that would have had a very significant implication for criminal justice bodies—indeed, much of the evidence that we heard from different organisations was stark and reflected their concerns about the potential

impact on their function, staff and effective delivery.

I thank all of those who gave evidence to us and for the candid way in which they set out the challenges ahead, such as how they could fund decent pay increases for their staff if the resource spending review plans were to come to pass. For example, Police Scotland told us that every 1 per cent increase in police pay in the future would cost £11 million per year to fund, which equates to around 225 staff; hence, a 5 per cent pay increase would cost about £222 million per year and could equate to a reduction of just over 4,400 officers and staff if no extra money was forthcoming.

Similarly, the Scottish Prison Service's chief executive said:

"there is no or at most, very limited, opportunity to the scaling back of"

its

"operations without significant risk to health and welfare support ... reputational damage, the loss of"

services

"and the risk to operational stability across the estate."

We heard that, in our courts, the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service

"might have to reduce summary and civil business by up to 25 per cent, cut back on the £3 million that goes into the budget to pay for part-time judiciary and look at the unpalatable option of reducing staff numbers."—[*Official Report, Criminal Justice Committee*, 2 November 2022; c 5.]

We also heard from senior staff in the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service that savings of between £29 million and £43 million would equate to a reduction of approximately 780 whole-time firefighter posts, or around 20 to 25 per cent of the whole-time firefighting workforce.

It is for those reasons and others that the Criminal Justice Committee said that the Scottish Government should find extra resources in its budget to provide a better settlement for organisations in the criminal justice sector than that proposed in the resource spending review.

John Mason: The member talks about the Government finding extra resources, and our committee convener talked about how we need to balance the budget. Did the Criminal Justice Committee have any suggestions about where those resources should come from; for example, should we cut the NHS budget, raise tax or something else?

Audrey Nicoll: I think that it is uppermost in everybody's minds, not just those of committee members, that if we are to increase a budget somewhere, we need to look at where that will come from. We were certainly very conscious of

that, but our priority in the budget scrutiny process was to look at the evidence that we were taking from the sector and reflect it in our report to the cabinet secretary.

We also said that any extra resources that could be provided needed to do more than just be used to support any pay increase awards in the sector.

In his response to our budget report, the cabinet secretary gave assurances that he had

"no intention of overseeing a budget for the police force that results in 4,000 officers leaving",

and that he also wanted to protect the provision of high-quality services in our prisons and courts.

I welcome those assurances and I welcome the fact that the cabinet secretary has been able to negotiate an additional £165 million of investment to address the significant pressures on the justice system. I note also that the capital budget for the sector will increase by £37.4 million in 2023-24, which is very welcome.

We know that the cabinet secretary has had to make some hard choices here, and I trust that our pre-budget scrutiny and the evidence that we took have helped him in the process of decision making. However, I note that, despite the extra resource, some difficult choices will have to be made.

The committee will be happy to work in partnership with the Scottish Government and other criminal justice bodies in 2023-24 and beyond, to prioritise spending and to make best use of the money that is available.

16:09

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): I am pleased to contribute to today's debate on behalf of the Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee.

The RAINE Committee focused its pre-budget scrutiny on two areas. First, the committee wanted to understand the impacts that inflationary pressures have had on the RAINE portfolio. Secondly, it scrutinised the implementation of the islands plan and the associated islands programme funding, specifically in regard to addressing population decline.

The RAINE portfolio has seen a reduction of only 0.1 per cent since 2022-23, but that figure masks some changes to the detail. The real impact of inflation equates to a reduction in the portfolio of 3.3 per cent. In addition, the £0.5 billion in savings that have been made to tackle the cost of living crisis has had an impact, with more than £60 million of those savings coming from the RAINE budget, including £33 million in savings from rural support. The rural support savings were

described as a deferral of UK Government ring-fenced funds, which are to be returned to the RAINE portfolio in future years. The committee will continue to monitor those deferred funds in the next financial year.

In the light of those budgetary and inflationary pressures, the committee sought to understand how the Scottish Government will support farmers and crofters. In evidence, the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands assured the committee that her priority was providing stability to the sector, and she cited the direct cash injection of £650 million into the RAINE portfolio and the expedited direct payments.

In February, the committee will kick off its pre-legislative scrutiny of the agriculture bill. That legislation and the associated policies will be vitally important for the future of the agriculture sector, forming the framework under which we will support farmers and crofters to transition to a more sustainable model.

The agriculture section of the budget has received a significant increase of 69.6 per cent compared with last year. That comes from a doubling of funding for the national test programme from £10 million to £20 million, and an increase in delivery costs for the programme from £3 million to £5.2 million. The Government says that that funding, alongside the agriculture transformation fund, is intended

“to support the transformation of how farming and food production is supporting Scotland to become a global leader in sustainable and regenerative agriculture, and to support the industry to achieve our statutory emission targets.”

The national test programme and the agriculture transformation fund are recent budget packages that have been created to support agriculture reform. Looking at the last few years, we see that the overall budget for those activities is still significantly below the original budget that was set out for the agriculture transformation fund when it was announced in February 2020.

Furthermore, uptake of soil tests and carbon audits have been lower than expected, with only 12 claims for carbon audits and 21 claims for soil sampling as of December 2022. It is, however, expected that applications will reach a peak towards the closing date.

The cabinet secretary has confirmed her ambition to expand the national test programme, and pointed to animal health and welfare measures that could be added to it. The committee is scrutinising the national test programme as part of its pre-legislative scrutiny to ensure that the programme is delivering on the Scottish Government’s ambitions and, importantly, that it is adequately supporting farmers.

At the other end of the supply chain, business development will see a significant decrease of 78.8 per cent in capital spend, from £16 million to £3.4 million. Those savings relate to the fact that the food processing, marketing and co-operation grant scheme, which was designed to support the development of food and drink processing businesses, will not run in the 2023-24 financial year. According to the Scottish Government, the reason for that is to allow a review to ensure that the scheme addresses future sectoral challenges and can better “serve the needs of” the industry. That is disappointing, as the scheme appears to have been well received, and following Covid it has continued—and it would continue—to support struggling businesses to recover. We will continue to monitor that budget line over the future years. The committee would have liked this scheme maintained at least until the economic situation had stabilised.

Marine Scotland has received a budget increase of £14 million, or 14.7 per cent, to support commitments to net zero and biodiversity. It includes funding for supporting initiatives such as the national marine plan, designating highly protected marine areas, and implementing policies from the fisheries management strategy, such as remote electronic monitoring and future catch policy. Marine Scotland stated that much of the increased budget relates to additional staffing and research capability, which is required to deliver a successful planning and consenting regime for offshore renewables and an increased focus on marine conservation activity.

The committee discussed the uplift to the Marine Scotland budget with the cabinet secretary and raised concerns that the shift to offshore renewables could further contribute to spatial squeeze in the marine environment. The cabinet secretary acknowledged the potential impacts and committed to continue to review operations. The committee will continue to monitor how progress is being made to balance commercial interests with wider conservation activities, to ensure the equitable use of marine areas.

We raised concerns about Marine Scotland’s capability to cope with its increased responsibilities and encouraged the Scottish Government to undertake an assessment of its operational capacity, to ensure compliance with the anticipated expansion of marine environmental protection.

I turn to the islands. The committee scrutinised the implementation of the islands plan and, specifically, the associated islands programme funding, taking evidence from local authorities and the Scottish Futures Trust. Local authorities painted a stark picture of the impact that inflationary pressures were having on island

communities. Argyll and Bute Council highlighted that travel and fuel costs in its area are, in effect, 185 per cent and 70 per cent higher than those in urban UK areas. Those significantly higher costs make securing capital projects more challenging for island authorities.

Although the committee is pleased that the Scottish Government has taken on board our comments regarding how funding can be improved in future years, it is disappointing that the Government decided to reduce the capital element of the islands programme budget in real terms, particularly given the inflationary pressures. The cabinet secretary acknowledged the constraints on the islands programme capital budget and highlighted the islands growth deal, which is providing £50 million from the Scottish Government and £50 million from the UK Government over the next few years.

Although the islands growth deal is to be welcomed, local authorities told us that they need a greater degree of certainty about the funding that they will receive, so that they can plan ahead. That is particularly relevant to capital projects, which need a pipeline to give contractors certainty that projects will get the green light. When the committee wrote to the cabinet secretary, it appeared that there was a concerted move to provide that certainty on a multi-annual basis. The cabinet secretary confirmed that multi-annual funds were not possible, due to the annual allocation process, but committed to providing as much certainty and clarity as possible.

Scrutiny will continue on how the islands plan and programme funding can be improved to deliver for our island communities. I hope that, in the coming year, we will get the chance to visit some of the projects that are funded under the programme to see what impact they are having on the ground.

16:17

Natalie Don (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP): I welcome the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Social Justice and Social Security Committee in the Finance and Public Administration Committee debate on the Scottish budget.

During this budget cycle, we have been acutely aware of the challenging economic circumstances in which the Scottish Government has prepared its budget. Notwithstanding that, the committee has been keen to ensure that budgetary decisions within its remit focus on protecting people on low incomes, as they are most affected by the cost of living crisis. Crucially, that includes the third sector, which provides vital support to some of the most marginalised groups.

To support that work, the committee has also examined how the Scottish Government is taking a human rights approach to its budget decisions and what that means for achieving social justice and addressing inequality. The cost of living crisis has brought poverty and the right to an adequate standard of living into sharp focus. The Scottish Human Rights Commission drew our attention to the need for poverty to be viewed in human rights terms and emphasised that

“Poverty represents a failure (a violation) to fulfil the right to an adequate standard of living that is established in international human rights law. Other rights, like the right to education, to work and decent working standards, to health and adequate food and adequate housing, are also affected by poverty ... Poverty, viewed through this lens, is thus best viewed as a cluster of human rights violations in Scotland.”

The Scottish Government has prioritised tackling child poverty—it is one of the four key priorities that it set out in the resource spending review. We welcome the increase in the Scottish child payment to £25 per eligible child per week, which the cabinet secretary has indicated should reduce relative poverty to 1 per cent below the interim target of 18 per cent. Of course, we will not know whether that is the case until statistics are available in 2025. The committee will therefore keep a watchful eye on progress throughout this parliamentary session.

With inflationary increases eroding the value of financial interventions, we actively encourage other committees to keep challenging the Scottish Government to tackle child poverty through policies that lie within their remit. Social security is just one way to invest in people.

The committee notes that, in 2023-24, the Scottish Government needs to find £776 million above what it receives in social security block grant adjustments, which is more than double what is needed this financial year. According to the Scottish Fiscal Commission’s recent forecast, that funding requirement is expected to continue to grow, reaching £1.4 billion by 2027-28. How to address that gap and the impact of the cost of living crisis proved to be a little more controversial for the committee. However, we wait to hear the outcome of the review of the fiscal framework and whether that will ease the pressure. Still, the fact remains that social security is, rightly, a demand-led budget and that, as such, funding will need to be made available.

It is therefore critical that we double down on preventative measures. We heard that for preventative policies to make a difference and to lead to sustainable and consistent improvements, such measures need to be funded over the longer term. We took evidence from the Deputy First Minister on the £53 million in-year cut to employability funding. The committee was

concerned that that would slow down progress on parental employment, which is a preventative approach aimed at reducing child poverty. We recommended that the cut should be time limited and asked the Scottish Government to provide a timescale in which the funding will be reinstated to the level before the cut. In response, the Government has committed to reinstating funding for 2023-24.

As I set out at the beginning of my speech, we have maintained our focus on the funding issues that the third sector faces. The issues that the sector is experiencing are long running. However, the pandemic, which was swiftly followed by the cost of living crisis, has seen the situation worsen to levels that have not been encountered previously.

Voluntary organisations face increased costs, including transport, supplier and materials costs, and rent—the most significant costs are energy and staffing. The Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations reminded us that the sector provides public services. It advised that

“voluntary organisations employ more than 135,000 people, which is 5 per cent of the Scottish workforce.”

The Poverty and Inequality Commission explained the impact on volunteers. It told us that

“volunteers who were offering to drive to deliver packages and care support to people can no longer afford the fuel”.

On the consequences of single-year funding on advice services, the Child Poverty Action Group said that

“short-term funding means that they cannot take someone on and train them up, because by the time they have done that, the funding will be over and the person will have had to leave.”—[*Official Report, Social Justice and Social Security Committee*, 22 September 2022; c 22, 25, 28.]

The Scottish Government has acknowledged that the sector needs stability of funding and the opportunity for longer-term planning and development. The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government advised us that the Government has adopted fairer funding practice, and that it is committed to increasing multiyear funding, with multiyear settlements as the default wherever possible, which is a welcome step forward. We will, of course, follow progress to see whether that approach is having the desired impact on the sector, as we are aware that other grant funders also need to deliver multiyear funding.

Before I come to the end of my speaking time, I would like to cover homelessness. Having a place to call home is an important aspect of an adequate standard of living. Following publication of the budget, Shelter Scotland raised concerns that funding for homelessness services had been frozen and that funding for the delivery of new

social homes had been cut, impacting on the Scottish Government’s international obligations on the progressive realisation of rights.

We asked the cabinet secretary about that. She clarified that funding

“for the affordable housing programme remains at £3.5 billion.”

However, she recognised that that translates to a real-terms reduction from the previous budget, which, the cabinet secretary noted, is due to the

“impact of high inflation”

and

“a 3.4 per cent real-terms reduction in our UK Government capital allocation between 2022-23 and 2023-24.”—[*Official Report, Social Justice and Social Security Committee*, 19 January 2023; c 15.]

However, the cabinet secretary did highlight that the Scottish Government was taking “steps to mitigate” the impact. On funding to eradicate homelessness, the cabinet secretary hoped to have two clear purposes—a reduction in the use of temporary accommodation and the prevention of homelessness—which would bring about a “sharper focus”. Again, we will continue to scrutinise progress in that area.

In conclusion, we have used our scrutiny to ensure that the Scottish Government’s budget takes account of low-income households and the impact of poverty and related preventative actions.

We acknowledge that this coming year’s budget is set against a very challenging fiscal context, not least because of the current cost of living crisis. It is essential in times such as these that the budget works to maintain the right to an adequate standard of living for the people of Scotland.

16:24

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I am pleased to give an overview of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee’s scrutiny of the 2023-24 budget. The main backdrop to our work has been the committee’s inquiry into the role of local government and its cross-sectoral partners in financing and delivering a net zero Scotland. That was the inquiry’s title, which is almost as long as the inquiry was. It started in November 2021 and touched on almost every aspect of net zero delivery at local level. It provided a really useful primer for our budget scrutiny this year.

The inquiry report came out on Monday, and I urge all members to have a read of it—or, at least, its executive summary, which is just two pages long and gets straight to the point. In it, we say:

“Scotland will not meet its ambitious target of being net zero by 2045 without a more empowered local government

sector, with better access to the skills and capital it will need to play a full role in this energy revolution”.

To be clear, that means that councils will need additional core resource to help to meet the costs of transition.

There will be a chance to debate that report, so I will move on from it to touch on three issues that we highlighted in our pre-budget scrutiny. The first is public transport. A fair fares review is being undertaken, covering pricing for all main modes of public transport. Our budget letter expressed concerns that the review had a low profile and that its timetabling and outcomes were unclear.

We asked for more clarity on all that and on what resources the Scottish Government anticipated setting aside at the end of the review to achieve the significant modal shift away from car use that we all want. The Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport's response was perhaps clearer on the first point than on the second. Last week, we sought to tease out the discussion further in a public evidence session with the cabinet secretary, and it was helpful to have clarification that the pilot scheme to be run under the review to remove peak fares on trains will apply only to some services and not nationally.

The cabinet secretary reminded us that buses—not trains—are by far the most widely used form of public transport, but the bus sector has been struggling, especially since the Covid pandemic. The committee acknowledges the resource that the Scottish Government has put behind the sector to help it to see out these difficult times. However, we want to be assured that there are policies in place to ensure that the sector not only survives but thrives in the longer term, not least because we will need a strong bus sector to help us to decarbonise transport. Whether we are there yet is not clear. For instance, councils are clearly still some way from making use of their new power to run local bus services. I am sure that the committee will want to keep an eye on that over the rest of the parliamentary session.

Besides the local government inquiry, the other main evidential source for our pre-budget scrutiny was the committee's snapshot inquiry in late spring last year on energy price rises. At the time, the outlook looked very bleak indeed, with truly frightening forecasts being made of the bills that householders would have to pay by the end of the year. If matters seem just a little less bleak now, I hope that that is due in part to the call that the committee and others made last year for a clear, decisive and confidence-restoring intervention by Government—principally by the UK Government, although the Scottish Government has had an important role to play, too.

Home insulation is an important and largely devolved area. In our pre-budget correspondence, we set out our disappointment at the apparent lack of urgency in escalating retrofitting and insulation programmes in response to the fuel crisis. The underlying issue is the overall heat in buildings strategy and how to pay for it, which is another issue that our local government inquiry touched on. I suggest that the Parliament will need to return to the issue in greater depth during this parliamentary session.

Finally, and very briefly, I draw the Parliament's attention to the committee's work in seeking to commit the Scottish Government to greater transparency on the carbon footprint of the national budget, so that we, as parliamentarians, can make a more informed decision at this time each year. There is no doubt that this is tricky and technical work, but, to paraphrase John F Kennedy when he announced the Apollo missions, we do this not because it is easy but because it is hard—or, rather, we ask the Scottish Government to do it. To its credit, it has undertaken to do so, albeit rather guardedly. I give an undertaking on behalf of the committee to hold the Government to that commitment over the course of this parliamentary session and to ensure that progress is made in that really important area.

16:30

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): As the Finance and Public Administration Committee, we have quite a focus on the budget for a fair part of the year. At the risk of repeating what I have said in previous years, the Scottish budget must be as fair as we can make it and meet as many needs as it can, but it must also be affordable, so it can never meet every need as we would, ideally, like it to.

In the first place, I very much welcome the effort to increase our resources so that we have more to spend on vital public services such as the NHS and local government services. I welcome the income tax increases, which add just 1p to the 41p and 46p rates.

The UK tax system is far too complex and inconsistent. As long as national insurance remains separate and regressive, and as long as income tax, corporation tax and capital gains tax are not more closely aligned with one another, we will get inconsistencies and artificial behaviour to avoid tax, such as people who are really employees becoming companies in order to pay less tax. As the Deputy First Minister said at our committee meeting on 10 January, such behaviour may be legal but it is also “morally wrong”, because people who live in Scotland benefit from things such as the policy of no university tuition fees and better early learning and childcare, and

they should therefore be paying more tax for those advantages.

Most people do not choose which country to live in on the basis of which has the lowest tax. They look at overall quality of life, they want to have a sense of community and, obviously, they want to be close to family and friends.

Although income tax is fairly progressive, which is welcome, our property taxes are not so progressive. That point was made by Professor Anton Muscatelli and the expert panel. I welcome the increase in the additional dwelling supplement from 4 per cent to 6 per cent. It is only a 2 per cent change, but it can help to swing the balance towards first-time buyers and away from second-home owners and those who buy to let, which has to be a good thing. I bought my flat when I was younger, as, at that time, did many people who were on fairly ordinary wages and salaries. However, it has become increasingly hard for younger people to purchase a home, and we need to do what we can to help them.

It is probably worth saying at this point that, in November, the committee had a very useful full-day conference with the Royal Society of Edinburgh on taxation in Scotland, and good papers on taxation have been produced by the Institute for Public Policy Research and others. I strongly believe that we need to get the general public more involved in discussing tax and where we, as a nation, want to go. Do we want to have lower taxes and to see public services decline as a result? Alternatively, do we want to have high-quality public services, with higher taxes to pay for them?

While I am on the bigger picture side of things, I should mention the fiscal framework. I very much welcome the fact that it is being reviewed. I know that we signed up to it fairly voluntarily, but it seems to me that it is fundamentally biased against Scotland. We cannot really compete with London and the south-east of England, so we will keep losing out unless the framework is changed.

Finally, I come to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body budget. I was very concerned by the proposal that the budget for the commissioners and the ombudsman should increase by 8.1 per cent. On top of that, we heard that there are calls for the number of commissioners to increase to 14. We need to remember that that money is being taken away from actual services. Every £1 for the commissioners is £1 less for front-line services.

My final point is about MSPs getting a pay increase of 1.5 per cent. I think that that is reasonable in the circumstances, and I very much welcome it.

Overall, we would all like to do more than this budget can do. However, our room for manoeuvre is limited, and I think that it is a very reasonable and realistic budget in the circumstances and that it should be supported.

16:34

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I welcome the committee's budget report, and I thank our clerks and our special adviser. I also thank the convener for his level-headed—at least, most of the time—approach to the task in hand. It is an important one, not just because budgets are always important but because this one is set against circumstances that are much more difficult than usual.

Next week's stage 1 debate will see us all taking party political stances on the budget, but today's debate is much more about the key issues that have been raised during evidence sessions. Central to those is the ambition to raise increasing amounts of revenue while at the same time improving Scotland's productivity and tax take. That will require addressing the issue of the number of people in the working population as set against the total population, which means having policies to encourage people back into the labour force after the pandemic and addressing the large number of people who have never worked at all.

That raises questions about what the public expects and should expect of the state. I am sure that Mr Swinney will agree that the Scottish Government cannot be expected to do everything.

At this point, we should note the received wisdom of many economic commentators and of key business groups such as the Confederation of British Industry that we are in desperate need of more highly paid jobs. That point was raised during the event with the Scottish Fiscal Commission yesterday. Scotland is far too prone to having a low capacity for economic growth, and, as we heard yesterday, that could lead to serious issues in the future.

That concern about economic growth raises a tension that a couple of conveners have mentioned. How do we find a balance between our commitment to a green economy and ensuring that the traditional industry can perform well enough to provide high-salary jobs? There are also questions about which policies will best encourage future investment in our industries. Financial services, renewables, energy and high-tech manufacturing are the areas most in the running to produce those highly paid jobs.

On the basis of estimates that have been provided to us, the committee has also discussed the issue of behavioural change. My colleague Michelle Thomson has rightly said several times to

the committee that behavioural changes are important to economic policy, and the committee has been asking how we can measure behavioural changes. John Mason referred to the increase in the additional dwelling supplement from 4 to 6 per cent, which might produce extra revenue and protect first-time buyers, as is the intention of the Scottish Government, but behavioural change in that area is causing other issues. Scrutiny of this budget has raised many issues around behavioural change.

The convener rightly expressed our concern about the timescale for public sector reform and the lack of detail that we have received about previous announcements by the Scottish Government. It is important that we get some clarity. Kenny Gibson was right to say that that is a major issue, because it impacts so heavily on the Scottish budget.

It is also interesting to note the comments by a few stakeholders about the principle of having three-year budgets, which would give a bit more certainty for planning ahead. Many of our stakeholders need some certainty about how they might be able to spend their money.

The Presiding Officer: Ms Smith, I must ask you to conclude.

Liz Smith: I am on my very last line, Presiding Officer.

I again pay tribute to all the stakeholders for their input to our scrutiny, and to the convener. I look forward to hearing the other speeches.

16:38

Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow my FPA committee colleague and to hear contributions from everyone who has spoken today. It is refreshing to have light rather than just heat. Many very valuable observations have already been made about the committee's report, so I shall simply make a few additional observations.

One of my biggest concerns is the flat capital budget. The Scottish Fiscal Commission points out that that is a real-terms cut of £185 million due to a lack of UK Government funding and the impact of inflation. I again emphasise that capital funding is vital for investment in long-term infrastructure improvements and for research and development spending. Typically, Governments will borrow to invest, yet in that matter the Scottish Government has significant restrictions where the UK Government has none. Our unbalanced devolution provides full powers to cut spending but vastly inadequate powers to borrow in order to invest.

I want to raise an issue regarding the data that we have on the Scottish economy. In some areas,

such as inflation, we are entirely reliant on Office for National Statistics data for the UK. In relation to understanding our economy, we also have inadequate data on the differential impacts of policy by gender, which is an issue that the Deputy First Minister will know that I continue to pursue with some vigour. In other words, if we are to see more strategic and long-term financial planning, which the committee has rightly called for, it would be purposeful to have all the data that is needed for us to do so. Therefore, rather than a focus on measures that serve no specific policy-making purpose, such as "Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland", I would welcome a focus on identifying areas such as the Scottish inflation rate and how our economy serves women as well as men.

There are other areas that could benefit from additional focus. For example, in giving evidence to the committee, Professor Sir Anton Muscatelli pressed the case for serious thought to be given to ensuring that growth results in an increased tax take. One aspect of spurring growth is that it will do more to encourage entrepreneurship and, in that regard, will do much more to support women entrepreneurs who face structural barriers. With that in mind, I look forward with interest to the forthcoming report by Ana Stewart and the tangible Government actions that I hope will arise.

Last week, at the University of Glasgow's Adam Smith event in Parliament, the Deputy First Minister talked of the importance of empathy and understanding the concerns of others. Smith also wrote of the importance of the rule of law. None of those things is served by the extent of corruption in the UK, where, each year, hundreds of billions of pounds in criminal assets is allowed to be laundered through the City of London—that is vastly more than the entire annual budget of the Scottish Government.

Former chancellor Nadhim Zahawi has been exposed yet again today, with more revelations about his tax affairs and the threatened use of abusive lawsuits to silence Dan Neidle. Even worse, thanks to openDemocracy, we now know that the Treasury under Rishi Sunak helped Putin's Prigozhin, when supposedly under sanctions, to mount a targeted legal attack on a London journalist.

There is a financial cost to corruption and a lack of ethics, and it does not just remove money from our gross domestic product. Ultimately, it results in fewer doctors, teachers and nurses, and it presents a risk to Scotland's global brand of probity.

16:42

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): As others have said, the current context is by far the most difficult in which a Scottish Government has had to set an annual budget. At this point last year, inflation was running at around 2 per cent, the UK Government had cut the Scottish block grant by just over 5 per cent in real terms, and we were rightly describing that budget as the most challenging yet in the devolution era. However, that time feels like the good old days when compared with what has transpired in the months since.

Fair pay for public sector workers is now one of the biggest challenges that the Scottish Government faces. To be absolutely clear, I note that the Scottish Greens believe that all workers—in the public, private and third sectors—deserve pay rises that are at least in line with inflation. However, with inflation rising above 10 per cent, a real-terms budget cut from the UK Government and an extremely limited set of tax powers, it is just impossible for the Scottish Government to deliver that level of pay increase without paying for it with devastating service cuts and job losses. It would cost around £2.5 billion. That is more than twice what had to be cut in last autumn's emergency budget review. I think that I am safe in saying that the Scottish Greens have the most radical tax policies of the parties in this Parliament, but even our proposals for existing tax powers would not raise close to the amount of money that would be required.

The Scottish Government has made painful decisions in order to fund the fairest possible pay offer to public sector workers, both in decisions to reallocate in this year's budget and in decisions in the draft budget for 2023-24. However, until this Parliament has the financial powers of a normal country, the only ways to fund fair pay without catastrophic cuts to services are for the UK Government to deliver pay awards to public sector workers in England that are enough to generate adequate consequential funding for Scotland, or for it to give the Scottish Government funding to make up for the damage that has been caused by inflation in-year.

The Finance and Public Administration Committee wants more forward planning from the Scottish Government. However, public sector pay is an example in which some of us have sympathy for the challenges that the Government faces. It is certainly not ideal for the budget to have been published without an accompanying public sector pay policy document, but it is understandable, given that current pay disputes have not yet been settled. I respect the right of unions to negotiate and demand as they see fit, but to me the situation presents a strong case for multiyear pay

settlements to become the norm, for the purpose of forward planning.

The relationship between tax and spending has always been challenging. Perfectly understandably, plenty of organisations engage with the budget process to demand additional funding for themselves, their priorities or their sector. However, very few groups propose where that money could come from. I therefore commend Unison for its submission to our pre-budget scrutiny, which included a range of proposed savings and tax changes. I agree with most, but not all, of them. Some are long-term reforms that could not be delivered in the next couple of years. However, it was a credible set of progressive proposals, which absolutely helped to shape the debate on tax policy last autumn.

I hope that the Government will respond positively to the committee's encouragement that it revisit the previously proposed national discussion on tax. The public deserves high-quality debate on how public money is raised and spent. However, as the convener noted, we are locked into an annual pattern of every sector just demanding more money—a bidding war that grossly oversimplifies how our public finances actually work. Worse than that, it makes it impossible for members of the public to distinguish between deliberate choices that are political, which they have a right to criticise, and those that are the inevitable result of external factors or limitations on the powers that are available to us.

Significant contributions are being made to the wider debate, such as the Scottish Trades Union Congress's tax paper, which was published shortly before the budget. That paper is relevant to the committee's other major conclusion on tax reform—about council tax—which neither aligns with the aim of having a progressive tax system nor gives councils the flexibilities and the financial resources that they need. It is a bit comical for a tax system to be based on valuations from 1992. That is two years before I was born—and I am on my second session in the Parliament. The Scottish Government and the Greens have a shared commitment to changing the council tax. I look forward to seeing progress towards that during the coming financial year.

I look forward to what I am sure will be a more robust and ideological debate next week, but I am glad that we have this opportunity ahead of that to discuss issues of process and substance on which a broad consensus can be achieved.

16:46

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): The Finance and Public Administration Committee heard much evidence from economic

experts on their views on the budget, both for this year and for future years. I, too, take the opportunity to thank them for their time in considering what are complicated issues. I also thank the committee clerks for, somehow, distilling our conversations into the excellent report that we are debating.

The report flags many areas of concern that the Government needs to address in the coming months. However, let us start with a positive. The Scottish Fiscal Commission has advised that the resource funding in the Scottish budget is set to increase by £1.7 billion, which equates to £279 million in real terms—the largest-ever core resource block grant. However, that is just about where the positive news ends.

These are certainly challenging times and we still have many uncertainties, which are highlighted by the report. Even at this late point in the financial year 2022-23, the devolved Government has no real certainty over how this year's budget will be balanced, or about the impact that that will have on the 2023-24 budget.

When the resource spending review was published in May 2022, we had been told that public service reform was key to providing a balanced budget. We were told that digitisation was key, that public sector innovation was key, that the reform of the public sector estate was key and that improving public procurement was key. However, nine months on, we are still no clearer about when those reforms will be delivered and what they will mean for our public services, or about the impact on our finances if they are not carried out.

We knew that reform meant a reduction in jobs to pre-pandemic levels. We can all guess where the axe will fall if we exclude health services from the reduction in the head count. It will, yet again, fall on local government—the easy target for the Government. Local government is under increasing pressure from the budget. I understand that the finance directors of all 32 local authorities have written to the acting finance secretary, outlining their concerns.

At committee, I often ask the Deputy First Minister about the Government's commitment to early intervention and prevention. To be fair, I always get back warm words, saying that those are absolutely key. However, again, I see no evidence of that in the budget. More and more local government funding is ring fenced, so that when it comes to cuts it will be our sports grounds that are cut, which will add to obesity and a greater health bill in future years. It will be community centres that are closed, which will lead to social isolation and poorer mental health. It will be education that is cut, which will lead to a widening attainment gap, and social programmes

will be cut, which will lead to increased crime and a larger justice bill in the future.

Short-termism is a theme that runs through the committee report—in particular, when it comes to building growth and productivity in Scotland. In his evidence to the committee, Dr Mike Brewer described the budget as being

“predominantly focused on dealing with the short-term challenges that are posed by the rising cost of energy and food.”

Professor Muscatelli stated in the same evidence session that the national strategy for economic transformation

“must be pursued with vigour because it is aimed at genuinely lifting business investment and productivity.”—*[Official Report, Finance and Public Administration Committee, 20 December 2022; c 14-15, 10.]*

I am concerned by the lack of focus on growth in this year's budget and by the short-termism that is at its heart.

In previous debates on the budget, I have said that you can tell a Government's priorities by what it commits finance to. In this budget, we can see only real-terms cuts—education and skills budget cuts, housing budget cuts, rural affairs and islands budget cuts, enterprise budget cuts and Police Scotland budget cuts. This is a short-term budget, from a short-term finance secretary in what, I hope, is a Government that has a short-term future.

16:50

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate as chair of the Scottish Commission for Public Audit. The SCPA's main role is to scrutinise Audit Scotland's budget proposals and accounts. Last Friday, we published our report on Audit Scotland's budget proposals for 2023-24. Unusually for the SCPA, we did not make a recommendation that the Parliament approve the total budget.

Audit Scotland describes itself and its role as providing

“politicians, decision-makers and the public with assurance and information about how public money is spent”.

That is more important than ever at a time when public spending has risen sharply in response to the pressures on public services.

In the case of Audit Scotland, though, who audits the auditors? Who provides that scrutiny and assurance about how the public money that is allocated to Audit Scotland is being spent? That is why the SCPA was established, under the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act 2000. The SCPA provides that scrutiny of Audit Scotland and, in turn, reports its conclusions to the

Parliament. By Audit Scotland, we mean the agency that provides the Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission with the services that they require to carry out their respective duties. Its budget comes from two sources: fees that it charges to audited bodies, and funding that comes from the Scottish consolidated fund and is approved by Parliament.

The SCPA met in December to consider the Audit Scotland budget proposals, specifically the

“£12,050k of Parliamentary approved funding which represents an increase of £563k from 2022-23.”

That figure could be broken down and attributed to six different factors, but I will focus on just a few.

Looking at the increase in fees and expenses paid to external audit firms that undertake work on behalf of Audit Scotland, the SCPA was keen to understand more about what was driving up costs. The budget proposal states that those fees will increase by 56 per cent in 2023-24, equating to £2.55 million. After receiving further evidence, the SCPA noted that the previous fees were unsustainable. It noted the increase in regulation around auditing and that the fees were

“consistent with an ... costing and benchmarking exercise.”

In relation to fees charged to audited bodies, we sought an explanation for the variation across sectors in fee uplifts, in particular in relation to the further education sector, where the average fee increase is 57.5 per cent. Audit Scotland explained in evidence that the fees that it charges audited bodies are informed by the outcome of the procurement process to appoint external audit firms, and that the increase in fees is most acute in the further education sector, due to the size of the organisations and the baseline costs required to deliver an audit compliant with the code of audit practice.

The SCPA was content with the rationale and explanations for most of the proposed increases in funding. Where we had difficulty was in understanding the rationale for a proposed £278,000 increase in support for the Accounts Commission. The commission’s function is to hold councils and other local government bodies in Scotland to account, and it is supported in its work by the staff of Audit Scotland. We noted that the Accounts Commission had already created and was about to fill a full-time role for a controller of audit. The commission also said that it required more staff for analytical work, stakeholder engagement and providing a refreshed website. The SCPA was keen to understand the drivers and assessments for the new post and the associated work.

It was explained to us that the Accounts Commission felt that it should be making more impact and had decided to initiate a change

programme. After hearing evidence and requesting additional information, we still found ourselves in the position of not being able to reconcile the asked-for budget of £278,000 with the need for that budget. We needed more substantive detail about the assessments for the work and its budget, and did not feel that a case had been made. We came to that position against the backdrop of the current economic outlook, the cost of living crisis and the difficult choices that are being made on the Scottish budget in seeking the most efficient outcomes in public spending. That is an unusual position for the SCPA to find itself in. We are required to examine the proposals from Audit Scotland—

The Presiding Officer: I must ask you to conclude, Mr Beattie.

Colin Beattie: —and to report on them to the Parliament. On previous occasions we have recommended approval of the proposals as part of the budget. We simply draw the attention of the Parliament to our concerns on the provision of what we see as being insufficient detail on part of the proposals.

The Presiding Officer: I call John Swinney to wind up.

16:55

John Swinney: May I first take a moment to reflect on Mr Beattie’s point? It is an important one, but I cannot say much about it because it concerns a parliamentary matter. However, the unusual subject matter that Mr Beattie has had to raise is one that the Parliament needs to reflect on. It is a matter not for the Government but for the Parliament, and it is one that it needs to take very seriously indeed.

Daniel Johnson: There is a technical aspect, which is that, although the Auditor General reports to the Parliament, the Audit Commission reports to the Government. There is a dual role in place on that technical point.

John Swinney: I am seeking not to get hung up on that technical point. Mr Johnson will understand that it is a rather invidious position for me to be in to be commenting about the auditors. I am simply pointing out to the Parliament that it needs to take seriously what Mr Beattie and the SCPA have put on the record.

Liz Smith made the most revealing comment of the whole debate when she said that in today’s contributions we have looked at the substance, the scrutiny and the evidence, and in next week’s we will get into the party politics. I therefore ask members to forgive me if I pay slightly more attention to what some colleagues say today than I will do next week. That is a little warning.

As he regularly does, Mr Mason gave the Parliament some pretty sobering warnings about the importance of the hard choices that are involved in the budget process and also in the reconciliation of difficult questions about tax. I welcome his support for the tax stance that I have taken.

Mr Mason's speech was followed by that of Douglas Lumsden, who made a strong argument for more funding for local government but did not offer a single scrap of evidence as to where that money was to come from. That just passes the usual test of contributions from the Conservatives on such questions: it is empty rhetoric.

In his contribution Mr Greer recognised the importance of the budget making provision—as we have had to do by adaptation and amendment in this financial year—for the challenge of public sector pay. On the concerns that I hear from members about the fact that the Government is not yet in a position to confidently set out its route to balance in this financial year, I say that it is not for the want of trying. It is also a measure of the scale of the difficulty and the challenge that the climate of surging inflation represents for us.

There are three principal themes to the Government's budget. I will reflect on each of them in responding to members' contributions.

First, in relation to the attack on child poverty, Michelle Thomson made a significant comment, reflecting on the Adam Smith legacy event, that it was important to have empathy for others—to walk in their shoes. If anyone needed to understand that, the contribution that Natalie Don made to the debate—in powerfully setting out the arguments made by the Social Justice and Social Security Committee, and the emphasis on the sustained measures on tackling child poverty—was an important example of such empathy and of understanding such challenges, which her committee has done in focusing on the position of low-income households. It also relates to the point that Claire Baker made about the importance of sustained investment in employability. I am glad that in next year's budget we have been able to improve the available resources for employability despite the interim cuts that I have had to make this year.

I turn to the theme of net zero. Edward Mountain set out—as did Finlay Carson—some of the inherent challenges in the journey towards net zero but also the necessity of making those commitments. The Government believes that we have put in place, with regard to capital expenditure in particular, the type of support that is necessary in that respect.

The third principal theme of the budget is sustainable public services. Gillian Martin, on

behalf of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee, reflected on the importance of the budget settlement for the health service and on the investment in social care.

Audrey Nicoll, on behalf of the Criminal Justice Committee, reflected on the difference between the budget settlement and the resource spending review, and on the fact that the Government has listened carefully to the challenges to ensure that we properly invest in the criminal justice system and meet its challenges.

Ariane Burgess made clear, with regard to the local government settlement, the importance of the investment that we have made and the need to ensure that that is sustained in the period to come.

In concluding, I will reflect on a couple of other contributions. The first is a point that Siobhian Brown made in relation to the Covid recovery activity. I reassure Parliament and the COVID-19 Recovery Committee, as I did last week, of the importance that we attach to mainstreaming the thinking behind the Covid recovery strategy across the Government's programmes. One of my priorities in the budget has been to do exactly that.

Lastly, Clare Adamson made a powerful point—

Edward Mountain: Will the member give way?

John Swinney: Very briefly.

Edward Mountain: I am sorry—I tried to catch Mr Swinney just before he came to his last point.

The Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee was very keen to find out the carbon cost of all the decisions that we are making. Is the Deputy First Minister prepared to reiterate the agreement that the Government will work to, in getting to net zero, regarding the actual cost of the carbon in terms of the money that we are spending.

John Swinney: I might wish to pursue that discussion with Mr Mountain in due course. My feeling would be that what we publish in relation to the carbon assessment should fit his requirements, but if it does not, I am happy to explore that further, because the issue has to be resolved. I think that we are doing enough in that respect, but I will happily explore the matter further.

Clare Adamson made an important point about the relationship between the amount of money that is spent on cultural investment and the disproportionate impact that that has on our society and wellbeing. If I did not know that point already, I would not have been listening to Fiona Hyslop, who for many years, as the longest-serving culture secretary in the Parliament, used to beat me into submission in budget agreements with that very argument. I pay warm tribute to her for that. It is an important point, and I assure

Parliament of my sympathy with that view. I reiterate that I want to ensure that we do all that we can to support investment in our cultural sector, recognising that, in the tough times that we are living in, people need to enjoy and appreciate the importance of investment in the culture that makes us who we are as a society.

17:03

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):

I am pleased to be closing this afternoon's debate on pre-budget scrutiny on behalf of the Finance and Public Administration Committee, as the committee's deputy convener. It has been an excellent debate, and it is an important opportunity for us all to tie together the work of our various committees and focus collectively on the priorities that are undoubtedly seen through the budget.

I also pay tribute to the clerks. If there was one thing in Douglas Lumsden's contribution on which I think that we can all agree, it is that they do an excellent job of weaving together the multiple different lines of questioning that we provide into something that looks far more coherent and robust than the raw material might suggest.

I also want to thank the members of the committee. As we heard during the speeches today, although we might have different perspectives, we have a shared approach, which is about ensuring that the implementation of tax policy is fair, robust and progressive, which John Mason talked about, and looking at how money is spent and what its impact is, which we heard about from the convener and from Michelle Thomson in her contribution on data. One of the key focuses of the committee, bearing in mind our public administration brief, is the need for clear strategies and plans as a framework to marshal spending.

One of the most important aspects of our shared view—on an on-going basis and in this afternoon's debate—is that we must have a goal of increasing prosperity in Scotland. Ultimately, that has to be one of the fundamental purposes of Government, and that must be seen in the budget.

I want to briefly point out that one of the more obscure responsibilities of our committee is that of scrutinising the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body budget. This year and last, we have considered a number of issues around project spending and the costs that are attributed to Parliament. The scrutiny of the parliamentary accounts and budget proposals is an important function of our committee.

Ross Greer: On the SPCB budget, does the member have any thoughts on the staff cost provision that is awarded to MSPs, relative to the

Parliament's wider staffing budget for the year ahead?

Daniel Johnson: That raises an important point. The committee considered the fact that the rate of inflation is way ahead of the pay settlements that are being offered across the public sector, including the Parliament. I am concerned about the difference between the settlement for parliamentary staff and members' staff. Perhaps the committee could consider that as part of its scrutiny in future years, and we might also think about hearing from staff representatives and trade unions as part of that scrutiny. I hope that that covers the member's point.

I thank members of various committees for their speeches, in which there were overarching themes, including the squeeze on public finances, the choices that that leads to and the approaches to that. Like others, I will highlight Clare Adamson's speech, because it covered those points comprehensively. She highlighted well the hardship and difficult decisions that cultural bodies are facing as a result of the current situation. That point was also highlighted by others, including Ariane Burgess, with regard to the housing budget. Of course, the issue also affects private sector employers through the decisions that the Government is making in terms of the levies that are being applied to them. This is undoubtedly a difficult time.

Clare Adamson also highlighted the need for innovation when approaching matters. That touches on the points that Mr Mason made about the need to have balance. We will need innovation, and we will need to consider that carefully. I urge members of the various committees to think about the substance of that point. We all agree that we need alternative approaches—that is undoubtedly true—but, until we get into the detail, we cannot see the difficulties around that in practice.

In its deliberations, the committee considered two particular points in relation to the approach. One was about looking at cross-portfolio impacts and preventative spend. I thought that that point was addressed excellently by Siobhian Brown and Natalie Don. If we are going to tackle poverty, that must be done on a cross-portfolio basis. However, as Clare Adamson pointed out, we must also look at the wider impacts of spend, such as cultural spend.

That point is hugely important, which is why the committee spent so much time examining the national performance framework. Earlier this year, we published the findings of our inquiry into the NPF—our "Report on the National Performance Framework: Ambitions into Action"—in which, as we have done in other reports, including one that we published this week, we indicated that there

must be a clearer link between spending decisions in the budget and how those impact the delivery of those national outcomes.

At times of fiscal constraint, it can be tempting to discard frameworks and plans such as the NPF. However, I think that, in such times, those frameworks and plans become ever more important, as they enable us to prioritise spending on the areas where it will have most impact. That point was brought to life by members very well.

Likewise, Clare Adamson and other members have brought to light the importance of multiyear financing and having clear patterns of funding. We highlighted that point in our pre-budget scrutiny report. In response, the Scottish Government said:

“It is challenging to identify in a meaningful way the individual annual impact of multiple budget lines on the delivery of longer term, complex national outcomes.

We are instead developing an approach centred around multi-year programmes, the associated outcomes and the annual spend profiles attached.”

We were unclear about precisely what that will involve, so we sought more detailed information. It is clear from members’ contributions that that is very important.

I will touch on Sue Webber’s contribution. The committee undertook work on the financial memorandum on delivering 1,140 hours of early learning and childcare. We see clear evidence of why a multiyear approach and clear patterns within a framework are needed—otherwise, there might be outcomes that are contrary to those that are intended. We should note with concern the reduction in the number of settings, especially in the private, voluntary and independent sector. That serves as an example of why robust multiyear funding and clear funding formulas are needed.

I want to highlight Gillian Martin’s contribution, as her remarks on the health budget are particularly important in bringing things together. Although the health budget might well be facing very clear issues—we are all aware of those—there is learning and innovation to be found in that sector. On her points about data and the need for more robust monitoring and evaluation, that will be absolutely critical if we are going to use our budget in innovative ways to deliver more in uncertain times. That tied in very well with Michelle Thomson’s contribution.

The committee also made comments about net zero and climate change, and the need for greater clarity. Our work on improving our efforts on carbon budgeting will be on-going. That touches on points that Edward Mountain raised.

Capital spending remains important. We welcome the Government’s commitment to bring

clarity by providing information on the classification of functions of government—COFOG. That might be a bit of a niche point for other members, but that is very important for transparency.

Finally, I want to touch on the proposals for the national care service, given the interest that the Finance and Public Administration Committee and many other committees that are represented in the chamber will have in that. The 2023-24 Scottish budget does not specify what level of spend has been incorporated into the relevant budget line for the establishment of the new service, so we found it difficult to determine whether the amount allocated in next year’s budget reflects the figures of between £60 million and £90 million in the related bill’s financial memorandum. We welcome the Deputy First Minister’s commitment to provide a revised financial memorandum, but we express our concerns about the lack of clarity in the budget.

I thank all members for their contributions to the debate. I look forward to the stage 1 debate on the Budget (Scotland) (No 2) Bill next week, which might have a somewhat different tenor and tone. We will hear more about the Scottish Government’s plans, and I am sure that we will hear a response to those.

Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland (Appointment)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is consideration of motion S6M-07650, in the name of Christine Grahame, on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, on the appointment of a new Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland.

17:13

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): As we know, the role of the Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland is an important one in the ethical standards framework. The commissioner is responsible for investigating complaints about the conduct of MSPs, councillors and members of public bodies, as well as non-compliance with the lobbying regime. In addition to complaints work, the commissioner regulates how people are appointed to the boards of public bodies in Scotland.

I turn to our nominee. Ian Bruce has been the acting ethical standards commissioner since April 2021, when the then commissioner was on extended leave. Ian has an honours degree in mental philosophy from the University of Aberdeen, where he majored in ethics. He has held a number of roles in the public, private and voluntary sectors, including as chief executive of Abbeyfield Scotland. From 2005 to 2021, he was the public appointments manager at the office of the ethical standards commissioner.

The panel believes that Ian will bring to the post fairness, integrity and professionalism, and I am sure that the Parliament will want to wish him every success. *[Applause.]*

I move,

That the Parliament agrees to the appointment of Ian Bruce as the Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland.

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

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S6M-07666, on suspension of standing orders. I ask George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that Rule 15.2.1 of Standing Orders be suspended on 1 February 2023.—*[George Adam]*

17:15

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): I rise to oppose the suspension of standing order rule 15.2.1 and the proposal to close the public gallery on Wednesday 1 February 2023.

The founding principles of this Parliament are openness, accountability, the sharing of power and equal opportunities. Those were agreed as a way to establish this body as answerable to the people of Scotland. By excluding the public from this Parliament's meetings, we are in direct contradiction of those principles and therefore we should reject the motion.

I accept, like everyone here, that it was necessary to do that during the Covid pandemic for serious and understandable health reasons, but we should not casually cast aside those principles of openness and accountability whenever it is inconvenient, especially when there are viable alternatives, as our colleagues in the Welsh Senedd have shown.

If it is not safe on one day for the public to attend and to be in the public gallery because of industrial action, we should not be meeting at all and the business can easily be allocated to other days. Regardless of people's views on industrial action, surely we can all agree as parliamentarians and as democrats, accountable to the people, that this measure to close the public gallery is wrong.

More than that, we are in danger of embarking on a slippery slope to shut the people out of this Parliament when it is deemed inconvenient to let them in. We are all temporary custodians of this institution and we have a duty and responsibility to uphold its founding principles. I therefore speak against the motion and urge members to reject it.

17:17

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (George Adam): I stand by what was said earlier, and I move the proposal that is before us.

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

Decision Time

17:17

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):
There are three questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that motion S6M-07602, in the name of Kenneth Gibson, on behalf of the Finance and Public Administration Committee, on the Scottish budget 2023-24, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament notes the pre-budget scrutiny undertaken by the Finance and Public Administration Committee, and other parliamentary committees.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-07650, in the name of Christine Grahame, on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, on appointment of a new Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees to the appointment of Ian Bruce as the Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S6M-07666, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on suspension of standing orders, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

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

17:18

Meeting suspended.

17:21

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that motion S6M-07666, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on suspension of standing orders, be agreed to. Members should cast their votes now.

Before I close the vote, I call Kaukab Stewart to cast a proxy vote on behalf of Stuart McMillan.

Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): On behalf of Stuart McMillan, I vote yes.

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

The vote is closed.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I was unable to connect. 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)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 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)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)

McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 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 (Caitness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Against

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 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 motion S6M-07666, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on suspension of standing orders is: For 85, Against 25, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that Rule 15.2.1 of Standing Orders be suspended on 1 February 2023.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Meeting closed at 17:23.

This is the final edition of the *Official Report* for this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

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