



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Meeting of the Parliament

Thursday 30 March 2023

Session 6



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 30 March 2023

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

General Question Time

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Good morning. The first item of business is general questions. Short and succinct questions and responses are appreciated.

Greyhound Racing

1. **Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission's recommendation that no further new greyhound tracks be permitted in Scotland. (S6O-02087)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): The Scottish Government will collectively consider all the recommendations made by the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission before any final conclusions are reached.

The minister, Màiri McAllan, confirmed during a parliamentary debate on 6 October last year that greyhound racing would be included within our commitment to consult with stakeholders on extending licensing legislation to animal care services. The responses to that consultation, along with the views of the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee and the SAWC's recently published report, will inform our next steps in respect of greyhound racing in Scotland. I would encourage all interested parties to share their views via the full public consultation, which is scheduled to be launched in early summer.

Mark Ruskell: I thank the cabinet secretary for that response. I take this opportunity to be the first to welcome her back to her position as cabinet secretary and pay tribute to the considerable leadership that we have seen from her over the past two years.

The commission's report highlighted that

"a dog bred for racing in Scotland currently has poorer welfare than ... other dogs".

The inherent risks of injury and death associated with racing greyhounds at up to 40 mph round oval tracks, alongside the lack of a veterinary presence at unlicensed tracks, led the commission to conclude that a phase-out of greyhound racing is "desirable". Does the cabinet secretary agree that it is now time to explore options for a phase-out in a way that leaves no dogs behind?

Mairi Gougeon: First, I thank the member for his initial comments.

The Scottish Government absolutely appreciates the depth of feeling that is associated with this issue. That is why we have committed to undertake a full consultation later this year into animal care services, which is now going to include greyhound racing. Scottish ministers will make clear our final position once we have been able to gather all of that evidence. That will include looking at the recommendations in the SAWC report. Once we have received all the responses to the consultation, we will fully consider all of that information and then consider what the next steps might be. I reiterate that it is ultimately about improving animal welfare, and I assure the member that that is at the forefront of our considerations.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I support my colleague on this issue.

I note that the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission also supports a snaring ban in Scotland, recommending that the sale of snares and their use should be banned on animal welfare grounds. However, the Wildlife Management and Muirburn (Scotland) Bill, as it has been introduced, just restricts their use. I advise the cabinet secretary that I—along with others, I imagine—will be pursuing a complete ban on snaring.

The Presiding Officer: I suggest that that supplementary question is not relevant to the substantive question.

Affordable Homes (Highlands and Islands)

2. **Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government how many affordable homes are required to be built to meet the needs of rural communities in the Highlands and Islands. (S6O-02088)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Shona Robison): Local authorities, as the statutory housing authorities, are responsible for assessing affordable housing needs in their areas and setting out their plans to meet those requirements in their local housing strategies and strategic housing investment plans.

We are committed to delivering 110,000 affordable homes by 2032, of which 10 per cent will be in our remote, rural and island communities. In this session of Parliament, we are making available £3.5 billion for affordable housing across Scotland. The Highlands and Islands region will see an increased investment in affordable housing of over £468 million in this session of Parliament—that is £85 million more than in the previous session of Parliament.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: There is a huge pressure on housing across my Highlands and Islands region, which is leaving many families and many key workers struggling to find a home, yet the Scottish Government has allocated less than £18 million of the £30 million that is available from the rural housing and islands housing funds. Will the cabinet secretary explain why that support is not being fully utilised? How will she make sure that, in the future, funding gets to the communities in my region that need to build the homes that so many desperately need?

Shona Robison: I reiterate that, through the affordable housing supply programme, which is the general housing investment fund, the Highlands and Islands region will receive £468 million in this session of Parliament, which is £85 million more than it received in the previous session.

The member referred to the £30 million rural housing and islands housing funds, which have been described as game changing. The budget adds value, but it is demand led, so projects need to come through the system. The funds offer support to community groups and others, complementing delivery by councils and registered social landlords. Between 2016-17 and 2021-22, those funds have supported the delivery of almost 8,000 affordable homes in rural and island areas. However, there is more to be done, which is why we are bringing the remote, rural and islands housing action plan forward in the near future, in order to see what more we can do to help rural housing development.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): The demand is there and it is urgent. However, affordable housing policy is made with urban, not rural, areas in mind. Will the cabinet secretary review housing policy with an eye to what works for rural areas? Young people are being forced away from home and essential services remain unstaffed because of a desperate lack of housing.

Shona Robison: We have done that, which is why the work on the remote, rural and islands housing action plan has been under way for some time. I hope that Rhoda Grant has been inputting into that plan. We have certainly made sure that key stakeholders have been involved in its development, and we are working with key agencies, including Highlands and Islands Enterprise and South of Scotland Enterprise, as well as the housing sector, to strengthen joint work and support key workers with employer-led housing. The plan will be published in the coming weeks.

I agree with Rhoda Grant that we need to do more around key worker housing in rural areas, which is why I am keen that, through the plan and

other work, we do more about it. I am happy to speak to her further about that.

General Practitioner Surgeries (New Patients)

3. **Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government how many general practitioner surgeries are not currently accepting new patients. (S6O-02089)

The Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport (Maree Todd): The Scottish Government does not hold information on the number of GP surgeries that are operating with closed lists. Under the terms of their contracts with national health service boards, GP practices must apply to the local NHS board if they wish to close their patient lists. The process for closing lists ensures that practices do not have to register more patients than they can treat safely, and practice closure notices should include conditions for reopening of the lists. We expect all NHS boards to ensure that everyone is registered with a GP practice.

Neil Bibby: It would be helpful if the Scottish Government could find out that information. I recently met with residents of Twechar, in East Dunbartonshire, which has traditionally relied on two GP surgeries in Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch, as well as previously having a weekly satellite service. However, new residents have told me that those surgeries are no longer accepting new patients and that the satellite service has not been restarted since Covid. Instead, they are having to travel to a third GP surgery with poor and unreliable public transport links. I also spoke to a Mrs Carey, who, because of a lack of GP out-of-hours services, had to wait six hours to be taken 18 miles to the south side of Glasgow for treatment. What is the minister going to do to fix the problems that are having a huge impact on people in Twechar?

The Presiding Officer: We must have more concise questions and responses.

Maree Todd: I assure the member that my officials will be engaging with all the boards and health and social care partnerships in order to ascertain their plans for that area. I am clear that the health and social care partnerships and the health boards in the two local authority areas concerned need to work together to ensure that patients' needs are met in Twechar.

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): With the Scottish National Party cutting £65 million from the primary care budget, it is little wonder that GPs are struggling to take on new patients and that GP surgeries are closing their doors for ever. Will the minister commit to reinstating the £65 million to protect general practice and patients?

Maree Todd: The member will be aware that we have more GPs per head of population in Scotland than there are in every other nation of the United Kingdom. The Scottish Government is committed to recruiting 800 new GPs by 2027, and we are significantly investing in a range of recruitment and retention initiatives so that being a GP remains an attractive career choice. We launched our GP recruitment marketing campaign in June 2022.

Primary care will be an absolutely key area for the incoming Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care, and I know that he will be keen to meet all interested parties to find the best way forward for that area of his portfolio.

Schools (Poverty-related Issues)

4. **Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to address any poverty-related issues in schools. (S6O-02090)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice (Shirley-Anne Somerville): The Scottish Government is committed to closing the poverty-related attainment gap and has a long-standing commitment to investing £1 billion in the Scottish attainment challenge. Our spending plans for 2023-24 across education and skills provide additional funding measures to address the cost of living crisis. That includes £13 million to continue the school clothing grant, an additional £16 million of resource and £80 million of capital to fund the expansion of free school meals for all primary 6 and 7 pupils in receipt of the Scottish child payment, and we are investing £22 million to provide meals during the school holidays to the children who need them most.

Bob Doris: A key anti-poverty initiative for Scotland has led the United Kingdom to extending universal free school meal provision, which has been increasingly important during the cost of living crisis. That policy is at the heart of our Scottish National Party Government strategy, with universal entitlement currently provided up to P5 and with the intention to roll it out to P6 and P7 as soon as possible. As I am sure the cabinet secretary will appreciate, parents are keen for the policy to be delivered, so can the cabinet secretary provide an update on progress? Where delay may be a result of capital works requiring completion, can the Scottish Government not support councils where they are already ready to deliver the policy—

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Doris.

Bob Doris: Can it not support them to deliver universally free school meals in P6 and P7 as soon as possible?

The Presiding Officer: I again ask members to ensure that their questions are concise.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: As I mentioned in my original answer, we are going further than the free school meals that are provided at the moment, which is the most generous provision anywhere in the UK. We see the expansion to primary 6 and 7 pupils in receipt of the Scottish child payment as the first step. Bob Doris rightly points to some of the challenges that some local authorities have regarding the capital project work that is required, but that is exactly why we are investing that £80 million of capital funding in support of local authorities, in addition to the £30 million that they have already been given.

Children and Families with No Recourse to Public Funds (Services and Support)

5. **Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government, in the light of recent reported comments by the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland regarding children and families with no recourse to public funds being unable to access front-line services in Scotland, what action it can take within devolved powers to monitor the situation of any such children and families, including any support that can be provided. (S6O-02091)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Shona Robison): The Scottish Government is clear that people with no recourse to public funds should be able to access public services unless the service is restricted under the United Kingdom Government's immigration rules. The Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities published the "Ending Destitution Together" strategy in 2021, with the aim of preventing and mitigating destitution caused by the impact of NRPF restrictions as far as possible within devolved powers. The Scottish Government will continue to monitor that, and we will do all we can within devolved powers to protect and support our communities, while urging the UK Government to change its position on this matter.

Maggie Chapman: Local authorities do not routinely publish data on the numbers of children and families who are subject to NRPF or information on how they monitor the issue—including in relation to costs and access to support. There are concerns about the resourcing of local health and social care partnerships to support them in dealing with the complex mental health needs involved.

Will the cabinet secretary consider putting the joint national guidance on NRPF that has been drawn up with COSLA on a statutory footing, and will she consider what needs to be done to provide the specialist mental health services that are required in different parts of the country?

Shona Robison: The national guidance for local authorities sets out the current legal framework and good practice to assist local authorities in meeting their statutory duties and in delivering an effective response when working with people who have no recourse to public funds.

The Scottish Government has provided £223,000 of funding to the Simon Community Scotland, in partnership with Safe in Scotland, to explore and address challenges that people with no recourse to public funds face in accessing support for their mental health. I am happy to speak to Maggie Chapman in more detail about that.

Long Covid (Research and Care Services)

6. Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on investment in research and co-ordinated care services to support those living with long Covid. (S6O-02092)

The Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport (Maree Todd): We are funding nine Scottish-led research projects on the long-term effects of Covid-19, with a total funding commitment of around £2.5 million. That includes projects to better understand the symptoms of—and factors associated with—long Covid, examine effects on cognitive function and evaluate rehabilitation approaches. In 2022-23, we have made available an initial £3 million from our £10 million long Covid support fund, to help national health service boards to increase the capacity of existing services that support people with long Covid, develop the services into more clearly defined local pathways and provide a more co-ordinated experience for people who access support.

Carol Mochan: I recently visited the Lister centre in Kilmarnock, where, among other pieces of extremely important work that are linked to heart, health and physiotherapy, the team will look at providing NHS Ayrshire and Arran's dedicated long Covid support. The work that the team does is incredible and should be commended, but the reality is that having access to co-ordinated long Covid care services is not guaranteed. It is a postcode lottery, and people from the most deprived areas are most likely to report symptoms of long Covid. Therefore, will the minister commit to making it a priority to ensure that further resource is provided for long Covid, so that there is adequate research into its lasting impacts and that there are clinics available across the country to help people who are suffering—

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Mochan.

Maree Todd: Absolutely. Our chief scientist office research funding schemes are open to

applications on long Covid. Those applications are very much welcomed and they go through the CSO's standard independent expert review process to allow funding decisions to be made. The guideline on long Covid—from the Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence and the Royal College of General Practitioners—is a living guideline, which means that its operation is reviewed, and decisions to continue or improve services are made in a dynamic way. The organisations that are responsible for the guideline's development continue to actively monitor the global evidence base on Covid and to make sure that the recommendations are informed by the most up-to-date and high-quality evidence, regardless of where the studies generating that evidence are. We must take the opportunity—

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, minister—we must move on to the next question.

Learning for Sustainability Action Plan (North-east Scotland)

7. Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the implementation of the learning for sustainability action plan in educational settings in the north-east. (S6O-02093)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice (Shirley-Anne Somerville): As with any aspect of the curriculum, the implementation of learning for sustainability is led by local authorities in individual education settings, but I am aware of the great work that is taking place across the country, including in the north-east. To further raise the level of ambition, the Scottish Government has been working with a range of partners to refresh its learning for sustainability action plan, which was first published in 2019, and that refreshed action plan will be published very shortly.

Jackie Dunbar: If Scotland is to meet our net zero ambitions, it is essential that we promote skills development in alignment with the fastest growing industries of the north-east. However, after another long, drawn-out announcement from the United Kingdom Government this morning, the Tory Government failed to give any credible detail on when the Acorn project will be given the green light to progress. Does the cabinet secretary think that Westminster Governments will ever stop treating Scotland's energy as a cash cow for the UK Treasury? [*Interruption.*] Will the UK Government ever harness the skills here to deliver a just transition?

The Presiding Officer: I ask Ms Dunbar to remember that the focus of questions must be on issues for which the Scottish Government has general responsibility in relation to the transition.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I am not surprised that the Tories do not like to hear that point once again, because there is a lack of focus from the UK Government on a just transition, and that makes the Scottish Government's job on that even more difficult. Although there are some welcome announcements in the UK Government's package, it did not provide clear content or a strategy to decarbonise the energy economy. The decision not to award the Scottish cluster track 1 status was, quite frankly, illogical. Although we welcome the UK Government finally setting out that the Scottish cluster is eligible for track 2 funding, it has failed to provide any certainty around when that funding will be awarded. This Government will continue to support the north-east and our highly skilled workforce. It is disappointing that the UK Government has, once again, failed to do so.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes general questions. Before we move to First Minister's question time, I invite members to join me in welcoming to the gallery the ambassador of Iceland to the United Kingdom, His Excellency Mr Sturla Sigurjónsson. [*Applause.*]

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is First Minister's question time. I call Douglas Ross.

Ministerial Appointments

1. **Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Thank you very much, Presiding Officer. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: We will suspend business at this point.

12:00

Meeting suspended.

12:01

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: This Parliament rightly prides itself on being open and accessible and, of course, we want to maintain that. Visitors are welcomed into the gallery to watch their elected representatives at work but, far too regularly, disruption is causing members to lose the opportunity to ask questions and to represent their constituents' interests. I assure members that work is under way on a range of measures that may be implemented to protect parliamentary business from persistent disruption. [*Applause.*]

We will go back to where we were. I call Douglas Ross.

Douglas Ross: Thank you, Presiding Officer. You will have our full support on that. I am pleased to say that I managed to hold my tongue this time with that interruption.

Less than 48 hours ago, Humza Yousaf stood in the chamber and promised to be

"First Minister for all of Scotland".—[*Official Report*, 28 March 2023; c 29.]

Yesterday, he had an opportunity to prove that with the new ministerial team that he appointed, but he failed in his first big test. The Government is the largest since devolution, with more ministers than ever before. However, key ministerial posts relating to social security and tourism were abolished and a new Minister for Independence was created. Does the First Minister really believe that appointing a taxpayer-funded nationalist campaigner is governing "for all of Scotland"?

The First Minister (Humza Yousaf): Can I say how delighted I am to have appointed the Cabinet that has the most women in it in the history of

devolution? Can I say that I am delighted to have been able to appoint a Cabinet with a number of members under the age of 40? Can I say how delighted I am to have appointed a Cabinet and a Government that are focused on the priorities of the Scottish people? We have a cabinet secretary for the wellbeing economy to put the economy first and ensure that the economy works for the people, not the other way round. We have a Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Just Transition to unlock our green potential—that is, of course, on the day on which the United Kingdom Government has once again relegated the Acorn project to track 2. We have a Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice to tackle child poverty and to help us to tackle the effects of Westminster austerity. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: As ever, only the member who has been called to speak should be speaking. I ask members to treat one another with courtesy.

The First Minister: Yes, I make no apology whatsoever for having a Minister for Independence because, my goodness, we need independence now more than ever before. We need it now more than ever before because, in energy-rich Scotland, we have Scots who are fuel poor because of the UK Government's policies. We need it now more than ever before because we have more food banks in this country than ever before, because of more than a decade of austerity. I say to Douglas Ross and the UK Government that we will continue to advocate and advance independence because we need it now more than ever before.

Douglas Ross: I found myself in the bizarre place of hoping that there might be another intervention from the gallery just to stop that long rant from Humza Yousaf, which did not address the question at all, because I specifically asked—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: We will suspend.

12:04

Meeting suspended.

12:05

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: I call Douglas Ross.

Douglas Ross: Be careful what you wish for, Presiding Officer.

I was just lamenting the point that Humza Yousaf clearly had a script prepared there. He read it ad nauseam—*[Interruption.]* I will try to continue if you want, Presiding Officer. Humza Yousaf read out a script—*[Interruption.]*—

specifically about an independence minister within his Government—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: I think that I will have to suspend, Mr Ross, unfortunately.

12:06

Meeting suspended.

12:06

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We will resume. Thank you for endeavouring to continue, Mr Ross.

Douglas Ross: Thank you, Presiding Officer. I was saying that Humza Yousaf's answer totally ignored the point of key ministerial posts that he abolished. The social security department had a cabinet secretary with an individual minister for social security. Ben Macpherson was an extremely efficient and credible minister. That position has been abolished by Humza Yousaf, yet he has been able to create a dedicated Minister for Independence. It is the same old from the Scottish National Party—another nationalist leader when Scotland needs a national leader.

Humza Yousaf is picking up exactly where Nicola Sturgeon left off. Just look at his first week in office. On Monday, within minutes of becoming leader of his party, he said that he would push "right away" for the powers to hold another referendum. On Tuesday, in a call with the Prime Minister, he demanded another independence vote. On Wednesday, he appointed a Minister for Independence. Instead of looking for areas of co-operation between Scotland's two Governments, he is looking for a fight. Does the First Minister seriously believe that that is a priority for the people of Scotland?

The First Minister: It has been just over 24 hours since I was sworn in at the Court of Session. My first act, just about 24 hours after being sworn in, is not to just double the fuel insecurity fund as we promised to do, from £10 million to £20 million, but to triple the fuel insecurity fund. That is because fuel poverty in this country is a disgrace. It is a disgrace that has been imposed on us by Conservative UK Governments. That is speaking to the priorities of the Scottish people.

Social security is the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice. In terms of tourism, we have a business minister—the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade—who will take that responsibility forward. I know that this is new territory for Douglas Ross, but it is a really good thing for a party leader to make sure that they make good on the promises that they made during an election campaign.

It is no surprise to anybody that, as First Minister of Scotland, I will advance the cause of independence. I will do that because I do not accept the fact that we have children in poverty in Scotland because of a decade of austerity. I do that because I do not accept that a country as energy rich as ours should be fuel poor because of the UK Government. I do that because I do not accept that people must suffer under sky-high energy bills.

I will continue to make the case for independence because, as I say, people need independence to unleash and unlock the potential of this country. We can do so much more with the powers of an independent nation.

Douglas Ross: The First Minister has to realise that independence is not a priority for people across Scotland right now, but getting our economy going certainly is. Let us hear what some of Humza Yousaf's colleagues have to say about his chances of reviving Scotland's sluggish economy.

Scottish National Party MSP Ivan McKee said that the Government needs to "reset" its relationship with business. An SNP source described one of the ministers who has been axed as

"one of the few non-idiots that was available."

Former SNP minister Alex Neil said that

"It seems that the ... best economic brains in the Government have been sidelined",

and another party source made an equally scathing assessment of the First Minister's reshuffle. They said:

"Huge challenges are coming in public finances ... Is this really the team that can tackle that? There is a concerning lack of numeracy skills within this group."

If members of Humza Yousaf's own party have no confidence in his ability to manage the economy, how can the country have any?

The First Minister: My goodness! How desperate is Douglas Ross? Do you know whose opinion I really care about? *[Interruption.]* It is the people of Scotland—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, members!

The First Minister: —who have given their verdict time and again. They have put their trust in the SNP election after election. They have done that because we deliver for the economy. They have done that because we deliver on the priorities of the people of Scotland. We have an incredible Cabinet with talent right across finance, the economy, social justice and wellbeing. Whether it is on the front benches or on my back benches, I am proud to have a team full of talent. When I look across to the Conservative benches,

they would not even make it on to my subs bench, Presiding Officer.

Let me say this much.

The Presiding Officer: Briefly, please.

The First Minister: I see that the First Minister may well have changed but Douglas Ross goes on the same old broken record of personal attacks and insult after insult. How much good has it done him? The latest poll that has come out shows that Douglas Ross has managed to lead—if that is the word—his party into third place. He is a third-rate politician leading a third-rate party.

Douglas Ross: I really hope that the First Minister gets better than this. He does not just have to take it from me. I know that he cannot see the faces behind him, but we can. We can see the reaction of his back benchers to his contribution here. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: We will suspend.

12:13

Meeting suspended.

12:13

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We will resume, and I call Douglas Ross.

Douglas Ross: Thank you very much. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: We will suspend.

12:13

Meeting suspended.

12:14

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: Regrettably, we are going to have to clear the gallery at this point; I am very sorry.

12:15

Meeting suspended.

12:19

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, colleagues. I do not think that I can adequately express my deep regret that such action is required in our national Parliament. *[Applause.]* I am extremely sorry for the overwhelming majority of those who have travelled to the Parliament today to watch

their elected representatives at work. I am pleased that we have been able to continue to accommodate our young people here and, while we continue to focus on a swift solution to this issue, we will see what we can do to target any response.

For today, given that we have had five disruptions, it is essential that we do all that we can to protect the wellbeing and safety of those who expect to come to the Parliament and quietly watch it at its work.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer: It is very unusual for us to take points of order during First Minister's question time, but I will allow it on this occasion.

Stuart McMillan: Thank you very much.

I absolutely agree with your comments and sentiments, Presiding Officer. Some young people remain in the public gallery, which I welcome. However, there are some young people who are no longer in the gallery—in particular, a school group from my constituency, who have travelled from Gourrock to be here today. There will be other young people who are now out of the gallery, too. I request that we get all the young people back in, because they have done nothing wrong.

The Presiding Officer: I am content, if members are, to wait for a few minutes to see what we can do to accommodate those who have been caught up in the disruption. I suggest that we suspend for a few more minutes to enable our colleagues in security to see what can be done in that regard.

12:21

Meeting suspended.

12:23

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: I call Douglas Ross.

Can we have Douglas Ross's microphone on, please?

Douglas Ross: If they got into the mic system, I was going to walk away—that was going to be it. [*Laughter.*]

I respect everything that you have tried to do, Presiding Officer, but this shower has been doing this week after week, and the image of genuine constituents being forced out of our Parliament is one that we will all regret and that none of us wants to see repeated. I am very grateful that young people have been able to stay, but we must

do something to prevent this from happening in the future.

If I remember correctly, because it was some time ago, the First Minister was trying to criticise me for some of the things that I was saying in my third question. However, those were all direct quotes from his own party members and even from his MSPs, criticising his ability to turn around the economy. Humza Yousaf is leading a divided party that has no confidence in his Government's ability.

It is no wonder why. Humza Yousaf has stuffed his Cabinet full with his predecessor's lackeys—ministers with almost as poor a track record in government as his. There are more ministers than every before, yet he managed to appoint only one who did not support him in the leadership election. He squeaked a win and then forced the former Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy, Kate Forbes, and her supporters out of the Government in an act of petty revenge. Now, to shore up his position in his feuding party, he is back pushing independence, because it is the only thing that unites the SNP.

Humza Yousaf is more divisive than even Nicola Sturgeon was. He has already split his party down the middle, and now he wants to do the same with the country. In these difficult times, Scotland needs a Government that is focused on the real priorities of people across Scotland and the big challenges that we face yet, instead, we have one that is at war with itself and focused on engineering further division. If Humza Yousaf cannot unite even his own party, how can he possibly unite the country?

The First Minister: First and foremost, I agree with the action that the Presiding Officer has taken. I am delighted that young people were allowed to stay. I commend those young people for behaving much better than some of the adults who were in the public gallery.

On Douglas Ross's criticism of the economic literacy of this SNP-led Government, I remind him that, under the SNP under Nicola Sturgeon and John Swinney—I am pleased to be building on their legacy—Scottish gross domestic product grew more than UK GDP. I also make the point that, if we had listened to Douglas Ross, who demanded that we copy Liz Truss's tax cuts for the wealthiest, we would have had more than £500 million less to spend to invest in public services. Thank God we did not listen to them.

I am building on a legacy of higher employment, lower unemployment and low economic inactivity.

As for division, the Conservative Party tore itself apart over Brexit. The Tory party has had more leaders in as many months than Douglas Ross has jobs. The talk of division comes from a man

who said that, if he was Prime Minister for one day, the only thing that he would do would be to hammer the rights of one of the most marginalised communities in the country, so I will take no lessons on division from Douglas Ross.

I am delighted to have appointed a Cabinet and a ministerial team that will build on the legacy that Nicola Sturgeon and John Swinney have left us, which makes us the most popular party in Scotland—the national party of Scotland. We will work every single day to earn and re-earn that trust. It is because we have focused on the priorities of the people of Scotland that we will continue—I am certain—to be the most popular party in this country.

Mental Health Waiting Times (Children and Young People)

2. Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): The new First Minister has lots to get to grips with, so it is only fair that I should start with something that he should already be across.

There is a mental health crisis affecting children across Scotland, but they are struggling to access treatment. During Humza Yousaf's time as health secretary, more than 11,000 children and young people waited more than the 18-week standard for treatment. Shockingly, more than 14,000 had their referral for mental health treatment rejected entirely. So, will the First Minister take the opportunity to offer an apology to the children and families he let down as health secretary?

The First Minister (Humza Yousaf): As has become customary when Anas Sarwar asks such questions, he does not acknowledge the impact of a global pandemic that has been the biggest shock to the national health service in its 74-year existence. Of course, I not only offer an apology but express deep regret to anybody who has been let down and had to wait longer, especially our children and young people. I would not want my loved ones—my children, if they ever needed the services—to have to wait any longer than they should.

However, we are taking action on recovery. I am taking action on recovery. For example, when we look at the number of young people who are waiting to be seen by child and adolescent mental health services, we see that the number of children who started treatment with CAMHS in the most recent quarter is the highest figure on record. In fact, the past four quarters have had the four highest figures on record for the number of children starting treatment with CAMHS.

I agree with Anas Sarwar: too many young people are waiting too long. However, through our action on recovery, which I will lead from Government, and which will be led by the Cabinet

Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care, we will make sure that we continue to invest in that. Because of our progressive taxation we are able to invest a record £19 billion in our health service. I hope that we continue to make improvements in relation to young people who are waiting for CAMHS.

Anas Sarwar: The First Minister cannot use the pandemic as his excuse, because in 16 years the Scottish National Party Government has never met its CAMHS standards.

Incompetence has consequences. Behind those statistics, there are struggling children and heartbroken families. I will give just one example: 10-year-old Alan Galbraith, who has been waiting for his mental health treatment to begin for the entire time that Humza Yousaf was health secretary. This is what Alan's dad, Robert, told us:

"He is really up and down. He will have days where you won't get a word out of him. We don't know what's happened unless something goes wrong. I feel like he's just being left. It doesn't matter what happens with him. There's been an array of cancelled appointments. We expect them to give Alan a diagnosis, maybe start treatment, something to help, but there's been nothing. All we get when we phone is that, 'We're sorry'. I cannot even begin to understand why Alan has gone from ready to start medication to the back of the queue, especially when it's a matter of mental health, and I really fear what further delay will mean for him. We just feel constantly let down. We are very aware of the pandemic, but there is just not an answer—all while my son and my family are suffering."

Health secretary Humza Yousaf failed that family; why will First Minister Humza Yousaf be any different?

The First Minister: I am more than happy to receive details of the individual case that Anas Sarwar refers to and to see whether there is any way we can assist Alan and his family.

I say again that I am the first—as I was when I was health secretary—to acknowledge that there are challenges and that there were challenges before the pandemic. However, all of us who have lived through the past few years will acknowledge that the impact of the global pandemic has been felt in our health service here in Scotland and in health services across the United Kingdom and right across the world.

We are starting to see improvement. The latest figures show that overall CAMHS waiting lists have decreased by about 777 people. The number of children waiting for more than 18 weeks has decreased by 1,110 and the number of children waiting for more than 52 weeks has decreased by 523, which is a 41.9 per cent reduction. The number of people who have been recruited to work in CAMHS has reached a record high under this Government and during my tenure as health secretary.

I fully accept that all that will be cold comfort to Alan, Robert and their family. I am more than happy to look at the individual case, but we are on the road to recovery—not only in our health service but in our mental health services.

Anas Sarwar: Alan was waiting for the entire time that Humza Yousaf was health secretary. Let that sink in: a young child who desperately needed help from our NHS had to wait for the entire time that Humza Yousaf was health secretary. There is no hiding behind any pandemic or behind the statistics in Humza Yousaf's book. Families are suffering right across this country.

We are not talking about just two years of Scottish National Party failure; there have been 16 years of SNP failure. This Government has never met its standard on a maximum 18-week wait for CAMHS. When Humza Yousaf was health secretary, Labour repeatedly called for a new referral system so that no young person would be rejected for treatment, for every general practitioner practice to have a dedicated mental health worker, and for mental health accident and emergency departments in every health board area so that patients could be fast tracked, but the SNP failed to listen.

Why cannot the First Minister see that, for children like Alan and their families, incompetence has consequences, that continuity will not cut it and that more of the same is not going to improve their lives?

The First Minister: I again say to Anas Sarwar that I am not suggesting, and have never suggested, that there were no challenges before the pandemic. Equally, I accept—as, I hope, he does—that the global pandemic has had a significant impact not only on our NHS, but on our mental health services.

We know that local authorities report that more than 38,000 young people and families accessed more than 213 new and enhanced community-based mental health services between January and June 2022. Why do I mention that? I do so because CAMHS is important, but our investments in early intervention are also extremely important.

I take the point about rejected referrals. That is why we have accepted the recommendations of “Rejected Referrals Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)”, following the audit that took place in 2018. I expect to see continued progress in that regard. We are confident that we will see, when statistics covering quarter 1 of 2023 are released in June, that a number of boards will have made significant progress in meeting the standard of 90 per cent of young people being seen by CAMHS within 18 weeks.

We know that health services right across the UK have been impacted by the global pandemic.

What are we doing about that? We are not only ensuring that we do the right thing in the recovery of the NHS but that we invest a record £19 billion in our health service in 2023-24.

What else are we doing? We are making sure—of course, I led on this as health secretary—that our NHS staff are the best paid of any in the UK. That is why I am pleased that we have not lost a single day to strike action this winter, which is very different from other countries across the UK.

The Presiding Officer: Question 3 is from Liz Smith. [*Interruption.*] Can I have Liz Smith's microphone, please?

Economic Priorities

3. Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the First Minister, in light of last week's “Fiscal Sustainability Report” published by the Scottish Fiscal Commission, what the Scottish Government's economic priorities are. (S6F-01965)

The First Minister (Humza Yousaf): The report highlights the impact of long-term change in demographics for our economy and public finances, but we are experiencing those challenges now as business and public services struggle to recruit and retain staff. There is simply no doubt that Brexit and the loss of freedom of movement have exacerbated those challenges. Scotland has distinct economic needs, so the United Kingdom Government must give us a formal role in deciding which occupations are on the shortage occupation list.

The national strategy for economic transformation sets out the actions that we are taking. Economic success is, of course, not just gross domestic product growth. It also involves delivering a wellbeing economy, which will increase productivity and international competitiveness and deliver fairer, greener prosperity for all of Scotland.

We are doing everything possible within the powers that are currently available, but we need the full powers of independence to truly unleash and maximise Scotland's potential.

Liz Smith: The report paints an extremely gloomy picture of the Scottish economy, most especially in terms of our weaker productivity, our demographic challenges and, in the words of the Scottish Fiscal Commission,

“the magnitude of the fiscal gap”

in the Scottish budget for the foreseeable future. How does the First Minister intend to address Scotland's substantial fiscal deficit? Does he now accept that Kate Forbes was absolutely right when she said that current SNP policies simply will not

cut it, because there has been a lack of focus on broadening the tax base and on economic growth?

The First Minister: I will tell you what—rejoining the European Union would certainly help us in undoing the damage that Brexit has done to businesses up and down the country. It is astonishing that Liz Smith was able to get through that question without mentioning the damaging impact that Brexit has had on our economy and on businesses up and down the country, with the loss of access to the largest single market in the world and the lack of access to freedom of movement. If she talks to any businesses in the hospitality industry up and down the country, they will tell her just how damaging Brexit has been.

Something else that has been damaging is the immigration policies that have been brought forward by her Government, which work against the economic interests of Scotland.

To extend an olive branch, I note that Liz Smith and I have worked on some of these issues before. For example, we worked on a post-study work visa. The UK Government rejected that. As I said, Scotland needs a role in relation to the shortage occupation list. The UK Government has rejected that. It should let asylum seekers work and pay tax—the member talked about increasing the tax base—but the UK Government has rejected that. We want to extend the rural visa pilot. The UK Government has rejected that.

We will do everything in our powers to help the economy, but we are doing so under the constraints of devolution and the constraints of a Tory Government that does not work for the economic interests of Scotland. We will not be able to maximise and unleash our full potential until we have the powers of a normal independent nation.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I welcome the First Minister to his post. The fiscal sustainability report makes it starkly clear that, without fundamental change, our public finances will be utterly unsustainable. Although the bulk of the sustainability risk lies with the UK, with public sector debt expected to rise to 267 per cent of national income, Scotland, due to demographic change and increasing demand, will also have to reprioritise its spending. What steps will the First Minister take to address this direct challenge to our public finances and the crucial services that they provide?

The First Minister: Kenny Gibson gets it in a nutshell. We are reliant on decisions made by the UK Government, which will impact and inflict damage, as they have often done, on our businesses and our economy.

There does not have to be a choice between growing our tax base—our revenue base—and

investing in the wellbeing economy. We can do both. We can have progressive taxation. I am really pleased that we have a legacy of progressive taxation left to us by John Swinney in his role as finance secretary. That means that we can invest in our economy, invest that extra £1 billion in our health service and invest in making sure that we have fair work. If we have fair work and that wellbeing economy, that is in the interests of not just the people, but the economy as well. However, Kenny Gibson is absolutely right. As long as the UK Government holds the majority of the financial levers in its hands, it will continue to hold this country back.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): Following the First Minister's very welcome comments in the *Daily Record* about the need to redistribute wealth more fairly, will he meet me and representatives of the Scottish Trades Union Congress to discuss further opportunities for progressive financial reform?

The First Minister: Yes, I will. I had very constructive engagement with the STUC during the leadership contest. It has some excellent ideas—for example, on how to increase revenue in a way that is fair.

I absolutely nail my colours to the mast when it comes to progressive taxation. Those who earn the most—such as Government ministers and MSPs—should pay the most. I make no apology for that.

At the same time, I believe in growing our economy, not for its own sake but so as to make sure that we invest in fair work. Every person in the chamber should be able to get behind that, so I do not understand why we hear the moaning and groaning from the Conservatives. Well, I do understand it, because, if we had listened to them and had given tax cuts to the wealthiest, we would have had over half a billion pounds less to invest in public services. No way will I do that. I will make sure that those who earn the most pay the most, to invest in our public services.

Household Energy Costs

4. Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what assessment the Scottish Government has made of the potential impact of the anticipated 1 April rise in energy bills on household finances in Scotland. (S6F-01996)

The First Minister (Humza Yousaf): The reversal of the cut in the energy price guarantee was the least that the chancellor could do this spring. A progressive Government that truly had people as its priority would have done so much more to support households in need. We called on the chancellor to extend the £400 energy bills support scheme, but he failed to deliver and, in

doing so, has placed more pressure on vulnerable households that are struggling to pay their bills and heat their homes.

In contrast, my first act as First Minister, 24 hours after being sworn in at the Court of Session, has been not to double but to triple our fuel insecurity fund from £10 million last year to £30 million in 2023-24. That fund is a critical plank in our support for people who are struggling with their energy costs. It continues to provide a lifeline to households that are at risk of self-rationing or self-disconnecting their energy.

Jackie Dunbar: Following the United Kingdom budget, Office for Budget Responsibility forecasts show that a typical household's energy bills are expected to remain in excess of £2,000 until at least the winter of 2024-25 and possibly beyond that. Will the First Minister take the opportunity to urge the UK Government to reverse the incomprehensible decision to scrap the £400 energy bill support scheme, which leaves many families in my constituency and across Scotland hundreds of pounds worse off?

The First Minister: Jackie Dunbar is absolutely right, and I join her in urging the UK Government to reconsider. The removal of the support scheme means that a typical household's annual bill will increase by around 19 per cent. As well as removing 50,000 households from fuel poverty, the continuation of the support scheme would have removed 120,000 Scottish households from extreme poverty. Instead, the UK Government has, inexplicably, chosen a course that will result in approximately 920,000 fuel-poor households in Scotland, which equates to around 37 per cent of all Scottish households. That is unacceptable.

Although the Scottish Government is doing everything that we can, within our limited powers, to ensure that people receive the help that they need, the UK Government could have done far more to ease the burden that affects so many. That demonstrates why we need the full powers of independence.

It is a scandal, Presiding Officer, that, in an energy-rich Scotland, our people face fuel poverty because of the actions—and, often, the inactions—of the UK Government. We must never accept that as the norm or as the status quo.

Poverty

5. Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to the poverty statistics published last week in the report, "Poverty and Income Inequality in Scotland 2019-22". (S6F-01981)

The First Minister (Humza Yousaf): For all individuals and for children, poverty levels are

lower than the United Kingdom average, but I state fully and unequivocally that they remain unacceptably high. That is why I want all the powers of a normal nation, such as all social security powers and all employment powers.

We will continue to use all the levers that we have, and have allocated almost £3 billion this year to a range of measures to mitigate the impacts of the cost of living crisis. Our investment in the Scottish child payment, the most ambitious child poverty reduction measure in the UK, is estimated to lift 50,000 children out of relative poverty in 2023-24. Tackling poverty will be the defining mission of my Government, which is why I will convene an anti-poverty summit to help guide the choices that I will shortly make as First Minister.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Over 15 years, the Scottish National Party has squandered Labour's legacy. People are poorer. Relative poverty is up. Poverty among disabled people is up. Persistent poverty is up. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear the member, please.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: The best spin that the SNP could come up with is that those terrible figures are stable. This First Minister has failed to tackle poverty in Glasgow, which he represents, and in Dundee, where he lives. He has failed to tackle poverty over 10 years as a Government minister. He says that tackling poverty is his priority, but he has not appointed a minister for social security.

I therefore ask the First Minister: why should people in Scotland trust him to reduce poverty?

The First Minister: Social security is being led by the cabinet secretary. It is a Cabinet position. The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice is sitting right there and she is waving right at the member. It is a Cabinet responsibility. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, members.

The First Minister: Here is what we are doing. We are spending almost £3 billion to mitigate the harmful effects of Tory austerity, which includes the game-changing Scottish child payment. We support families in a variety of ways, including through free school meals for around 145,000 pupils and free bus travel for under-22s. As I mentioned, we have made significant increases to our fuel insecurity fund but also our food insecurity fund, as well as the Scottish welfare fund.

If Pam Duncan-Glancy does not believe me, I will quote John Dickie of the Child Poverty Action Group, who is known to members right across the chamber. He said:

“There should be no doubt Nicola Sturgeon has made huge progress putting in place the building blocks needed to end ... child poverty.”

It should also be said that the statistics that are being quoted and discussed are from before we increased the Scottish child payment.

Let me say really clearly to Pam Duncan-Glancy that I did not get into politics just to mitigate the impact every time that the UK Government brings forward harmful policies. Every time that we do that, we have to take money away from the national health service, from education, from transport and from justice to mitigate the harmful impacts of cruel Tory policies. Would it not be better to have the full powers over social security, over the finances and over employment all in our hands, instead of being at the mercy of a UK Government? That is the difference between Pam Duncan-Glancy and me—

The Presiding Officer: Briefly, please.

The First Minister: She wants to keep those powers in the hands of the Conservative Party; I want to make sure that they are in our hands so that we can unleash this country’s potential.

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): The Scottish child payment has not yet been paid to many of my constituents. On Monday, I visited a charity that has been trying to help those individuals. I was told not to even bother contacting Social Security Scotland until next month, because it cannot make that payment. And yet the first decision by the First Minister was to take away a minister with sole responsibility for social security.

Will he look at that again, and will he apologise to all my constituents and to the hundreds of people across Scotland who are still waiting for that money because of a system that is simply not working?

The First Minister: I say, again, that I am happy to look into individual cases if Jeremy Balfour wishes to bring them to my attention—or, indeed, to the attention of the cabinet secretary who has responsibility for social security, my Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice. We will of course look into that.

However, let me also say once again, particularly to the Conservative member, that the Conservatives are utterly shameless. More than a decade of austerity and economic vandalism mean that energy prices and inflation are sky high and that we have a Tory cost of living crisis. They literally took money out of the pockets of those on universal credit during the pandemic. Let me say to Jeremy Balfour that no one believes his crocodile tears for those who are suffering as a result of Tory cruelty.

Climate and Nature Emergencies

6. Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Government will take to tackle the climate and nature emergencies. (S6F-01967)

The First Minister (Humza Yousaf): The Scottish Government is committed to tackling the twin climate and nature crises—*[Interruption.]*—and ensuring a just transition that creates jobs and economic opportunity across Scotland. I thought that we had had enough interventions, Presiding Officer. *[Laughter.]*

That is at the heart of the Bute house agreement between the Scottish Greens and the Scottish National Party Government. I very much look forward to working together with them, and across the chamber, to deliver the actions that we need. Our top priorities include the development of our next climate change plan, a draft of which will be brought to Parliament this November, and taking forward our new biodiversity strategy. That will ensure that Scotland plays its part in delivering on the goals in the new global biodiversity framework agreed in Montreal in December.

Ariane Burgess: As the United Nations secretary general said last week,

“Our world needs climate action on all fronts: everything, everywhere, all at once.”

That is the challenge for our new climate plan, and the Scottish Greens are committed to playing our part in ensuring that we meet it. It is a plan that will transform transport, reshape land use, radically shift how we keep our homes warm, and reap the reward of tens of thousands of green jobs in our new economy.

Later today, the First Minister will set out his new Cabinet and ministerial team to the Parliament. Will he outline how that new team will be set up to deliver our greatest challenge, which is the climate challenge?

The First Minister: Let me be absolutely clear that my Government is committed to tackling the climate emergency. When I spoke to the new members of the Cabinet, including the junior ministerial team, I made it clear that we must be radical and bold in all areas of Government, but particularly over the biggest challenge that our planet—and our humanity—faces, which is of course the threat of climate change. It is a priority that will run across the work of all members of my Cabinet and my ministerial team and one in which I will take a personal interest.

The transition to net zero is not just one of the defining challenges of our time; it presents a huge economic opportunity for Scotland. If we unleash the green potential of this country we will create tens of thousands of jobs in the decades to come.

I will work tirelessly to ensure that we grasp that opportunity, creating green jobs and opportunities right across Scotland. I want the north-east of Scotland, in particular, to be the net zero capital not just of Europe but of the world.

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): The First Minister has been part of a Government that, as the Climate Change Committee has pointed out, has missed seven of 11 of our legal climate targets, including being minister for the portfolio area that is the highest emitter of greenhouse gases, which is transport, at a time when—to coin a phrase—the trains did not run. Why has the Government of which he has been a minister for more than a decade failed to deliver a credible plan that will even come close to meeting our target of net zero by 2045—a Government that the Climate Change Committee has said will almost certainly miss its target to reduce emissions by 75 per cent by 2030?

The First Minister: We have world-leading targets, which are also some of the most ambitious in the world. The latest emissions data, which is for 2020, shows that Scotland's emissions are down by more than 50 per cent since the 1990 baseline, which is over half way to zero. We continue to be ahead of the United Kingdom as a whole in delivering long-term emissions reductions.

We are also already making progress on decarbonising our energy systems. In 2020, Scotland generated the equivalent of almost 99 per cent of our gross electricity consumption from renewable sources.

I have already said that we will come to Parliament with our climate change plan, which will be ambitious. I say to Scottish Labour members that what does not help is their opposing us at every single turn, and on every single climate measure that we bring, simply for the sake of opposition. I say to all members that if they are serious about tackling the climate emergency they should back us when we take the radical and bold action that is required.

The Presiding Officer: We move to general and constituency supplementaries.

Cricket Scotland (Institutional Racism)

Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): The First Minister will recall his meeting with me and representatives of sportscotland and Cricket Scotland following the “Changing the Boundaries” report, which found institutional racism within Cricket Scotland. [*Interruption.*] Despite that body having been placed in special measures, the working group has made no meaningful progress to date. In fact, it has met only once in seven months. Well-respected members of Cricket

Scotland's anti-racism and equality, diversion and inclusion advisory board have resigned, and many in the sport have spoken out about their concern that the issue is just not being taken seriously. It is a fast-moving situation, so who knows what will happen next?

I am sure that the First Minister will agree with me that enough is enough and that polished PR from Cricket Scotland just will not cut it—we need action. Will the First Minister commit to calling for an urgent meeting to meet me, the chair of sportscotland and Cricket Scotland to discuss the woeful lack of progress and to find a constructive way forward?

The First Minister (Humza Yousaf): I am not sure why there was groaning from some members on the Conservative benches when, to her credit, Kaukab Stewart was raising such an important issue. I pay tribute to many of those former and current cricket players who put their heads above the parapet to talk about racism, which is not an easy thing to do—they did that at much personal as well as professional cost. Again, I do not understand why there was chuntering from some members on the Conservative benches in response to what is a very important question indeed.

We are clear that there is no place for racism or discrimination of any kind in sport or indeed in wider society. In my previous role, I had a number of meetings with sportscotland and Cricket Scotland to discuss this very matter. My understanding is that there have been robust discussions between sportscotland and Cricket Scotland in the past week and sportscotland has reiterated that all options are being considered as Cricket Scotland is being held to account. The final decision on whether Cricket Scotland exits special measures will be dependent on all recommendations from the “Changing the Boundaries” report being fully met. We will continue to engage with Cricket Scotland and I will ensure that the appropriate minister meets Kaukab Stewart. I will also make time to meet Kaukab Stewart to discuss the issue further, because it is very close to my heart.

University of Edinburgh (Sexual Assault Reporting)

Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con): Last week, we heard shocking allegations that the University of Edinburgh discouraged two students from reporting sex attacks to the police, with one student reportedly being told that the university would be unable to support her if she reported the incident to the police.

Does the First Minister agree that survivors of sexual assault must be fully supported to report crimes against them and will his Government

commit to an independent investigation to establish the full facts of that situation and why it was allowed to happen?

The First Minister (Humza Yousaf): Of course, the university is independent of the Scottish Government, but I absolutely agree with Pam Gosal, who has a strong track record of standing up for people in regard to such issues. I am very worried and, frankly, horrified by the situation as she articulates it. I accept that I do not know the full details, so perhaps, after this session, if Pam Gosal feels that she can, she could furnish my office with the full details.

In a previous role, when I was justice secretary, I often commended the excellent work that has been done by Fiona Drouet and her family through EmilyTest, and I hope that every university will sign up to that excellent initiative.

I will consider the actions that Pam Gosal has asked me to consider and I hope that she can furnish me with further details. However, I absolutely share her sentiment that anybody who has been a victim of sexual harassment or sexual abuse must be fully supported, particularly by our universities and colleges.

Aberdeen City Council (Library Closures)

Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland (Lab): In Aberdeen, the Scottish National Party has, for the second time, voted to permanently close six libraries in the city tomorrow. However, Aberdonians know that local government has a statutory requirement to provide adequate library facilities to all residents, and we all heard the First Minister's predecessor when she said that the Scottish Government is committed to supporting libraries directly. Will the new First Minister reassure my constituents that he will not stand by and allow our library buildings to close?

The First Minister (Humza Yousaf): I agree with the sentiment of the member's question around the importance of our libraries. They are important not just for those who love books; they provide a number of important facilities, such as information technology facilities for people who might not have access to broadband. They also provide other services—welfare services can often be provided in libraries. Many of us, as members of the Scottish Parliament, will hold our surgeries in local libraries. Therefore, I absolutely agree with the sentiment behind the member's question. We place great importance on public libraries and we believe that everyone should have access to those public libraries.

Equally, it is often the case that members across the chamber quite rightly believe, as I do, that decisions for a local authority should be made by the local authority. Aberdeen City Council's

plan to close libraries will be extremely difficult for the library staff and the community. However, we recognise the financial challenges that local authorities are facing.

My policy, as I said throughout the course of the recent campaign, is to work with our local authorities to get them a new deal that will allow them more financial freedom and flexibility. In 2023-24, Aberdeen City Council will receive £436.9 million to fund local services. Taken together with the decisions to increase council tax by 5 per cent, the council will receive an extra £34.3 million to support vital services. In addition, all local councils will receive their fair share of the current undistributed sum of £329 million.

Football (Free-to-View Television)

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): I take this opportunity welcome to welcome the new First Minister to his seat. I know that he, like me, will have taken great joy in watching the Scotland men's team triumph over Spain at Hampden on Tuesday in a famous victory. He will also be aware that, unlike fans in England and Wales, viewers in Scotland do not have access to watch their men's national team on free-to-view television. What, if any, engagement has taken place with broadcasting providers about showing those football matches on free-to-air TV? Does the First Minister agree that increased access to games such as that on Tuesday will help to inspire the next generation of footballers?

The First Minister (Humza Yousaf): I heard Jackie Baillie shout, "Oh, seriously!" for some reason. I thought that we would all get behind our national team following its phenomenal result the other day. Even the ray of sunshine that is Jackie Baillie must be able to get behind the Scottish football team. After that result, I noticed that there were some calls to put Steve Clarke in the Cabinet, but I think that he will do an even better job where he is.

Fulton MacGregor makes an important point. I could not be clearer that the international football matches that the Scottish women's and men's teams play in should be part of the crown jewels of free-to-air sporting events. Sadly, as we know, the United Kingdom Government has failed to act. We will continue to press the UK Government to expand the listed events regime but, of course, as I have said before, it would be far simpler if those powers rested with the Scottish Parliament.

We will work with the Scottish Football Association to continue to make football more accessible to all across society. Fantastic performances such as the one that we saw on Tuesday night can not only put a smile on the faces of the nation but also inspire people of all

ages—young and not so young—to get active and kick a ball around.

Endometriosis Advisory Group

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): I think that the breaking of a glass in the chamber earlier was not a good omen for the new First Minister.

I recently met with three campaigners from Endometriosis South of Scotland. All spoke of their own experiences; all in unbearable pain and having to go private in order to get a diagnosis. That is a typical situation for women across Scotland, who face a wait of up to eight years for a diagnosis. On Sunday, it was revealed that the Scottish Government's endometriosis advisory group has not met since April 2022. Does the First Minister agree that that is an insult to the 100,000 women across Scotland who are suffering with unbearable pain? Will he commit to ensuring that the group meets?

The First Minister (Humza Yousaf): Rachael Hamilton has raised an exceptionally important point. I was involved with that work in my role as health secretary, and, in a previous role, Maree Todd took forward much of that action as the minister with responsibility for women's health. I have met with a number of organisations that represent women who have been particularly affected by endometriosis.

Rachael Hamilton is right that far too many women wait far too long for that life-changing diagnosis. The women's health plan is committed to taking forward some of that work, and I am happy to look at the meeting of the endometriosis advisory group in order to see what further progress we can make. Rachael Hamilton is right to highlight that issue, and I will write to her with an update.

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

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): The First Minister will be aware that we have been waiting more than two years for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill to come back to the chamber to be remedied. During that time, there has been a changing Government narrative about why the bill has not come back to the chamber. Can the First Minister undertake that the bill will return to the chamber before the summer recess? If he cannot, will the Government publish correspondence and information on what is causing the hold-up between the Scottish Government and the United Kingdom Government?

The First Minister (Humza Yousaf): Once again, I do not disagree with the sentiment behind Martin Whitfield's important question. We wanted to make sure that those rights were incorporated into our legislation, because we want to do the best by our children and our young people. We know the action that the UK Government chose to take. We are continuing to liaise with it and I will see what can be published in relation to those discussions.

As soon as we have some sort of agreement on the way forward I will ensure that we make progress, because there is nothing more important than the rights of our young people—I say that as a father of two children. I will absolutely consider the member's request to see what can be published, but I can give him an absolute promise that there is no shortage of intent, pace or urgency from the Government that I lead.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes First Minister's questions.

Colleagues, I deeply regret that, due to the completely unacceptable interruptions that we have experienced today, I am unable to call any more members to put questions to the First Minister on matters of importance to the people they represent. I again apologise to those visitors who travelled here in good faith, and often at great inconvenience, to watch their representatives at work.

Please rest assured that I will review and escalate measures as required to counter the actions of a small minority who seek to disrupt our work. I have no doubt that all members share my determination that our democratically elected Parliament will continue to do its vital work on behalf of the people of Scotland.

13:05

Meeting suspended.

14:30

On resuming—

Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Question Time

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): Good afternoon, colleagues. The first item of business this afternoon is Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body questions. I invite members who wish to ask a supplementary question to press their request-to-speak buttons during the relevant question.

There are quite a number of questions and I am keen to get through as many as I can, so I request brief questions and answers when possible. I advise colleagues that, in relation to questions 4 and 5, I will take supplementaries after question 5 has been answered.

GMB (MSP Staff Branch)

1. Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): I refer members to my entry in the register of interests as a member of the GMB trade union.

To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body when it will next meet with representatives from the GMB trade union MSP staff branch. (S6O-02095)

Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con): As a faithful attendee of these corporate body sessions, I am sure that Mr Bibby will recall the substance of the answer that I gave to Pam Duncan-Glancy when she asked that question in November last year. To summarise, there is no employment relationship between the corporate body and the MSP staff; it would not, therefore, be appropriate for the SPCB to meet with the GMB in its capacity as the representative of staff who are employed by MSPs.

The corporate body's role is to apply appropriate indices to ensure that provisions that relate to staff costs, which are contained in the members' expenses scheme, are updated annually. Thereafter, it is a matter for MSPs, as individual employers, to determine the salaries for their staff.

Neil Bibby: I recognise what Mr Carlaw has said about the formal arrangements. I believe that it is important for the corporate body to fully consider the views of the GMB, which represents many Labour and other MSP staff, both before the staff cost provisions are set in process for 2024-25 and on other issues. The GMB has warmly welcomed—as I have—the fact that the chief executive of the Parliament indicated his willingness to be informed by those views.

Does the minister agree that that is a welcome development and that it is important for the

corporate body to hear from the GMB on staff pay and other significant issues that affect its members, before decisions are made?

Jackson Carlaw: Although ministerial appointments follow this corporate body session, I am not living in hope. However, I thank Mr Bibby for the attribution. [*Laughter.*]

It is open to MSP staff to speak with the representatives on the corporate body from any given party in order to allow our deliberations to be informed.

Although it would not be appropriate for the corporate body to meet with trade unions that represent MSP staff, Mr Bibby is correct, in that I understand that the chief executive has indicated his willingness to do so in advance of the corporate body submitting its budget to the Finance and Public Administration Committee. Although he has indicated his willingness to do so in order to be informed of the views of the representatives of MSP staff, the corporate body is clear that that is not the equivalent of entering into a formal negotiation.

Translation Services

2. Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body what discussions it has had in relation to access to translation services for cross-party groups. (S6O-02098)

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): The Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body is committed to providing accessibility support to enable members of the public to engage in parliamentary business. However, as the member is aware, cross-party groups are not a formal part of parliamentary business and, as such, the corporate body is not responsible for providing resources for them.

Nevertheless, as is set out in the members' code of conduct, cross-party groups may use the Parliament's facilities where those are available for public use. That means that MSPs and CPGs can access the interpretation infrastructure of our meeting rooms, which includes a portable set of equipment and headphones. They can also access the advice and guidance on language support that is set out on the cross-party groups page of the Parliament's intranet.

In addition, we are aware of a facility in Microsoft Teams to support remote interpretation for informal meetings. We are developing guidance for MSPs and committees on that facility, and we will also place the guidance on the CPG pages of the intranet.

Paul Sweeney: I thank the corporate body for that helpful response.

As the convener of the cross-party group on migration, I recently asked whether our CPG could access translation services, as the group has a number of non-English-speaking members. I was told that the group would have to cover the cost of a translator. However, as a CPG with a number of members who are seeking asylum without the right to work, we do not charge membership fees, nor do we have cash to cover translation costs.

I appreciate that the standing orders state that CPGs are not part of formal parliamentary business. However, will the corporate body commit to reviewing its policy on access to translation services, specifically, for all meetings in the Parliament, whether formal parliamentary business or not, so that we can ensure that this Parliament is accessible to all?

Christine Grahame: I thank Paul Sweeney for his supplementary question. I think that we are prepared to review the policy. However, with regard to cross-party groups perhaps having greater access to support, that would be a matter to put to the Parliament through the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee in order to assist CPGs in engaging with the members of the public they bring in. That is worth looking into.

Pay Negotiations (Scottish Parliament Staff)

3. **Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body whether it will provide an update on pay negotiations with trade unions representing Scottish Parliament staff. (S6O-02099)

Jackson Carlaw (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body): I am pleased to be able to confirm that agreement has been reached on a pay deal for Scottish parliamentary staff for 2023-24. The deal, which was recommended by all three of the corporate body's recognised trade unions—the Public and Commercial Services Union, Prospect and the FDA—for acceptance to their members, was arrived at following intensive negotiations. I place on record the corporate body's thanks to Lorna Foreman, who led the negotiations for the Parliament for the first time, and to everybody whose participation resulted in the successful outcome of the discussions.

The pay award that has been agreed is progressive and fair, ensuring that the highest percentage increases will go to those staff on the lowest grades. The corporate body has agreed to extend its existing guarantee of no compulsory redundancies until the end of the current parliamentary session.

The corporate body's wage bill for 2023-24 will increase by 5.6 per cent and, as Carol Mochan will be aware, the staff cost provision, which is

accessed by members to employ their staff, has also been uplifted by 5.6 per cent for 2023-24. It is for members to determine salaries for their staff.

The corporate body is pleased to be able to support its staff in this way and is grateful to its partner unions for the pace and intensity with which they have engaged with the negotiation and for coming to an early resolution.

Carol Mochan: I welcome the pay offer that has been made, in particular the £15 per hour minimum wage that the PCS union and others have campaigned so hard for and won. The Scottish Parliament is setting a really good example to other employers in providing a £15 per hour minimum wage.

However, the reality is that not all staff who work on the parliamentary estate will receive £15 per hour. As Jackson Carlaw will be aware, MSP staff whose jobs are in the administration and office management job family can have a minimum annual salary of £20,855, which equates to £11.46 an hour. Case workers are paid the equivalent of £14.03 an hour, and jobs in the communications job family are paid £26,717 a year, which equates to £14.68 an hour. Given the £15 an hour minimum wage for Scottish Parliament staff, will the corporate body now consider amending the job families for MSP staff and uplifting the staff cost provision to ensure that MSP staff, too, receive a minimum wage of £15 an hour?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I made a request earlier for brief questions and responses.

Jackson Carlaw: It is important to say that the MSP staff pay bands that are established by the Parliament are indicative; they are not compulsory. It is very much a matter for individual MSPs to determine what level of pay they wish to award.

The 5.6 per cent increase that is being paid to parliamentary staff in total, as with the 5.6 per cent increase that is going to the staff cost provision for MSPs, means that there are members of the parliamentary staff at higher grades who will be receiving no or very little increase this year and others at lower grades who will be receiving increases in excess of 8 per cent. The whole system is designed to allow a degree of variation to reflect the individual circumstances of the employee. It is for members to decide how they deploy the sum that they have as their total staff cost provision.

Deposit Return Scheme (Preparations)

4. **Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body whether it will provide an update on what preparations it has made for the launch of the Deposit Return Scheme. (S6O-02028)

Claire Baker (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body): The SPCB is continuing to review the requirements under the Deposit and Return Scheme for Scotland Regulations 2020 and how they apply to the restaurants, coffee bar and shop on the Holyrood site. As part of the preparations, the Scottish Parliament has registered as a producer with Circularity Scotland, because we sell Scottish Parliament-branded whisky in the shop.

Maurice Golden: At the moment, this Parliament's waste is collected by a Scotland-based small or medium-sized enterprise that follows the highest environmental standard in waste management. However, when the deposit return scheme eventually launches, the contract to collect empty containers will be handled by a large, multinational company that has been fined for illegally dumping waste abroad. Has the minister in charge of the scheme raised any concerns about that with the corporate body? What will happen to the existing contract with the SME provider?

Claire Baker: As the member will recognise, it is not appropriate for me to comment on the debate that is on-going around the scheme. The contract is made with Circularity Scotland, not with the Scottish Parliament, so it is not for me to answer questions on that area.

The Scottish Parliament is striving to comply with the regulations. We recognise that it is essential that all businesses and organisations have clarity around some of the issues.

Deposit Return Scheme (Preparations)

5. Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body whether it will provide an update on what progress it has made in preparing for the operation of the deposit return scheme. (S6O-02061)

Claire Baker (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body): I refer the member to my previous answer.

Brian Whittle: The Parliament has a public cafe and shop that will sell products that are subject to deposit return scheme legislation. How will the public return those items to the Parliament to redeem their deposit, especially when they cannot re-enter the building with empty glass bottles? Will there require to be a reverse vending machine outside Parliament? How much will that cost?

Claire Baker: We are considering the need for reverse vending machines, which would be leased or hired. It is likely that such machines will be used initially for Parliament staff. We are still considering how we will comply with the regulations under our responsibilities as a producer in the public areas of the building. At the

moment, the costs are estimated. Once we have further information, we will share it with members.

Family-friendly Environment

6. Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body what steps it will take to create a more family-friendly environment. (S6O-02062)

Maggie Chapman (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body): The Scottish Parliament was founded with the ambition of being a modern, family-friendly Parliament, with—uniquely in Europe—a free crèche, in an effort to remove barriers to parents of young children engaging with democracy. The crèche will reopen in May. I can say more about that later, if the member would like me to do so. In addition, we have a sitting pattern that allows for Fridays and Mondays to be spent in constituencies or regions.

However, it is clear that our approach has not always worked. Given its responsibilities for providing staffing and services to support parliamentary business, the SPCB recently wrote to the Parliamentary Bureau to set out some concerns about the impact of late decision times, whether planned and unplanned.

We have asked the bureau to consider, among other things, providing improved notice of the anticipated decision time each day and of planned changes to decision times. We have also asked for its views on introducing a cut-off time for plenary business. We hope to have a meeting with the bureau in the near future to discuss those issues.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members who are coming into the chamber to respect the fact that SPCB question time is on-going and to not engage in private chatter.

Martin Whitfield: The SPCB has a responsibility for the staff in the Parliament. In correspondence, it has become apparent that the SPCB is seeking to obtain further information about the challenges to the Parliament's family-friendly set-up. I politely suggest that there is plenty of information already available. With regard to the staff who are employed in the Parliament, the SPCB could take decisions that would not need input from the bureau. Would the SPCB consider reaching out to members of staff to get solutions to the problem, so that we can move forward, in anticipation of having—as the member rightly said—a family-friendly Parliament?

Maggie Chapman: The member is right—the corporate body has responsibility for Scottish parliamentary service staff. For members who are not aware, some SPS staff are required to remain at work for at least two hours after Parliament has finished sitting, so it is clear that we have a

responsibility and a duty of care. That is why we want to discuss matters with the bureau.

However, the member's point is a good one, and we will take it up to ensure that we get the information that we need and that we set the parameters within which discussions and debates can take place, so that we live up to expectations when it comes to being a family-friendly Parliament.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I repeat the plea to members who are coming into the chamber not to engage in private chatter while SPCB question time is running.

Meghan Gallacher has a brief supplementary.

Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con): Members may be aware that I have been raising this issue for quite some time. Since my return to Parliament in January, I have found it challenging to balance life here and at home. Talented MSPs have stood down because of the way in which parliamentary business is structured. I know that that is an issue for the Government and the bureau, but we do not want to deter people, especially women, from choosing to enter public life. Therefore, in line with the request made by Martin Whitfield, I ask the corporate body to consider forming a group of MSPs, their staff and SPS staff to look at how we can make this Parliament more family friendly.

Maggie Chapman: We can certainly consider that. However, the corporate body must first have a conversation with the bureau to ensure that we are all discussing the same thing and that we are all aware of the constraints on members and the different staff—members' staff and SPS staff—we have. We must ensure that we understand what we are trying to fix.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: With apologies to those I was unable to call, we have now reached the point at which we must move on to the next item of business.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I hope that it is helpful to point out that there is something wrong with the microphones. I could not hear Brian Whittle and I struggled to hear both you and Meghan Gallacher.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We think that there may be an issue with the microphones and we are investigating that. I encourage members to tilt their microphones towards them, which should help in most instances. We will look into that and will make improvements, if possible.

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

Ministers and Junior Ministers

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of motions S6M-08469 and S6M-08470, in the name of Humza Yousaf, on appointment of Scottish ministers and junior Scottish ministers. Members who wish to speak in the debate should press their request-to-speak buttons.

14:47

The First Minister (Humza Yousaf): I ask Parliament to agree to the appointment of four new Scottish ministers and eight new junior Scottish ministers.

Before I go any further, I will take the opportunity to pay tribute to the ministers who are leaving the Government.

Keith Brown has been a key figure in the Scottish National Party Government for many years. Among his notable achievements, he has been a champion of the fair work agenda and has worked hard to support and reassure businesses in the wake of the Brexit referendum. His work on the upcoming criminal justice reform bill will make a sea change in the support that is available to victims of crime. I also highlight his admirable work on behalf of our armed services veterans and their families.

Ben Macpherson has served effectively in a number of posts over the past five years and has most recently played a key role in the continued roll-out of Scotland's social security system. He has covered a wide range of portfolios, which is testament to the breadth of his experience.

Clare Haughey has worked tirelessly to improve the lives of children and young people. She was the driving force behind the Government's efforts to support those who have been affected by the cruel historical practice of forced adoption, which culminated in the formal apology by the former First Minister just last week.

Ivan McKee has relentlessly promoted Scotland as a place to do business and to invest. We all recognise, and pay tribute to, the key role that he played in helping our vital supply chains at the height of the global pandemic.

Meanwhile, as members will all have seen, Kate Forbes and I have spent quite a lot of time with each other in the past few weeks. Since the leadership contest ended, she and I have had some long chats about what contribution she could make to the new Government. Despite some suggestions to the contrary, those chats have—as she has said—been very cordial, very warm and very positive. What many people will not have seen is that, behind the scenes, as we travelled

across the country, Kate, Ash Regan and I and our respective families got on far more happily than might have been suggested. Kate is a tremendously talented politician. I know that she will continue to make a formidable contribution to Parliament, in particular on behalf of her constituents. I am sorry to see her leave Government for now, but I have no doubt, and I sincerely hope, that she will return to ministerial office at some point soon.

There are two other departing Cabinet members to whom I must pay tribute. In Nicola Sturgeon, Scotland has had one of the most able and effective politicians across the UK in decades. For those of us who are following in her Cabinet footsteps, she has provided a master class in leadership.

John Swinney has been a rock in the Scottish Government since 2007, and behind the scenes he has always been a cool and wise head at the Cabinet table. Many of us have gone to him for advice—in fact, all of us in the Cabinet, I suspect—at one point or another.

When it comes to First Minister's question time, Nicola Sturgeon and John Swinney know all the tricks of the trade, so it is fair to say that I am slightly dreading the first week that I look at the *Business Bulletin* and see the name Sturgeon or Swinney in the list of back-bench questioners to come.

I wish Nicola, John and all the other departing ministers all the very best for the future. Needless to say, having such a formidable array of talent on the SNP back benches is an enormous asset for me and my Government.

I turn to the new appointments. I think that even the SNP's harshest critics would agree that the ministerial team is very different from the one that it replaces. Of 28 ministerial posts, only six positions remain unchanged. The Cabinet that I am proposing will have 10 members—six women and four men. It will therefore have a higher proportion of women than the previous Scottish Cabinet. By average age, it will also be the youngest Cabinet that Scotland has ever had, with five members under the age of 40.

It is a fresh line-up for a new era of Government and, as we look to the challenges of the future, it is very much a changing of the guard. The balance of portfolios reflects the key priority areas that I have set, which are: protecting people from the cost crisis; enabling our NHS and public services to recover; supporting a net zero wellbeing economy; and improving the life chances of people the length and breadth of the country.

First, although her appointment does not require approval, I am delighted that Shona Robison has agreed to serve as Deputy First Minister and

Cabinet Secretary for Finance. In her long years in Government, Shona has, for example, been a driving force behind delivery of the Commonwealth games, and as the then Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport she championed the interests of both patients and staff. Most recently, she delivered a significant roll-out of the game-changing Scottish child payment. Shona will bring her experience and skills to her new role, in which she will not only be responsible for the budget and taxation, but will have important cross-governmental responsibilities for delivering on our key priorities. I know that she will prove to be a very worthy successor to John Swinney.

Shona Robison will, naturally, work very closely with Neil Gray, whom I appoint as Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy. For a number of years, Neil served as the SNP's Westminster social justice spokesperson and took a leading role on issues such as employment, fair work and pensions. Most recently, as a Scottish Government minister, he worked on our Ukraine resettlement programme with partners in local government, the third sector and the UK Government. Neil will undoubtedly bring the same levels of energy and effectiveness to the work of supporting our wellbeing economy.

That task, of course, goes hand in hand with our plans to achieve net zero, and Màiri McAllan will be at the forefront of those efforts as Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Just Transition. I think that it is fair to say that by common consent Màiri has done sterling work as an environment minister, in ensuring greater protections for our natural environment. She is a passionate advocate for a just transition at home and for climate justice overseas, and I know that she will be a huge asset to the Government in her new role.

I am also seeking Parliament's approval for the appointment of Jenny Gilruth as a cabinet secretary. Being Minister for Transport is a tough brief—I know that only too well—but Jenny has overseen the taking into public ownership of ScotRail and has driven further progress on decarbonisation of our transport system. Before entering politics, Jenny was a secondary school teacher, which I know will stand her in very good stead as Scotland's next Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills.

Finally, I have asked Angela Constance to be Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs. Angela brings significant ministerial experience to the role. Most recently, she has worked tirelessly to reduce drug deaths in Scotland. That will continue to be a central priority for the Government. Before entering politics, Angela worked at the front line of our criminal justice system, as a prison social worker. I have no doubt that the depth of her experience will be of huge

value as she takes forward the Government's justice reforms.

Those Cabinet appointments require parliamentary approval. In addition, I have reappointed a number of existing cabinet secretaries. Michael Matheson will have responsibility for national health service recovery, health and social care. As a former occupational therapist and a highly effective minister—he was a health minister earlier in his political career—Michael is well placed to take on what is a crucial role for the Government.

I am very pleased that Shirley-Anne Somerville will lead on social justice, which is a central priority for the Government.

Angus Robertson will continue as Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, and Mairi Gougeon will remain at rural affairs.

I turn to the junior ministerial appointments for which I seek the Parliament's approval. Again, there are a number of new faces. Siobhian Brown has performed admirably as convener of the Parliament's COVID-19 Recovery Committee. I have asked her to support Angela Constance, as Minister for Victims and Community Safety.

Since being elected, Jenni Minto has been an exceptionally active member of the Parliament, having contributed to the work of three committees and no fewer than 15 cross-party groups. I know that she will bring a similar work ethic to the role of Minister for Public Health and Women's Health.

As convener of the Social Justice and Social Security Committee, Natalie Don has brought a laser-like focus to one of the Parliament's most important priorities, which is supporting people who need it most. She will continue to do that in her new role as Minister for Children, Young People and Keeping the Promise.

Meanwhile, Natalie Don's deputy convener, Emma Roddick, will become Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees. Emma will also, I think, become the youngest-ever minister to be appointed to the Scottish Government. However, she has proved that she is more than ready for that responsibility.

Paul McLennan is set to become Minister for Housing. He brings a significant and varied range of professional and political experience to his new post, including through his role in local government and his time on the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee.

Gillian Martin will become the new Minister for Energy. Before she became an MSP in the north-east of Scotland, she spent many years working in our vital oil and gas industry.

Elsewhere in the team, Joe FitzPatrick has substantial previous experience as a minister. I am pleased that he has agreed to return, as Minister for Local Government Empowerment and Planning.

Graeme Dey was also an excellent minister, previously. He will return to Government with responsibilities for further and higher education. He will also resume his previous role as Minister for Veterans.

A number of current junior ministers will remain in Government. Some will remain in existing portfolios; others will move to new portfolios. In particular, in line with the Bute house agreement, I am pleased that Patrick Harvie and Lorna Slater will continue in their ministerial roles. The partnership between my party and the Scottish Green Party has brought significant benefit to the Government in Scotland—[*Interruption.*]—but also to our country as a whole, and the fact that that upsets some members so much tells me that those are absolutely the right appointments to make. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, members.

The First Minister: Presiding Officer, the team that I present to Parliament combines fresh talent with proven ability. That team will help Scotland to seize the opportunities and meet the challenges that are before us. I assure members that each member of that team is ready and eager to get on with the work of delivering for the people of this country.

It therefore gives me great pleasure to move,

That the Parliament agrees that Jenny Gilruth, Màiri McAllan, Neil Gray and Angela Constance be appointed as Scottish Ministers.

That the Parliament agrees that Joe FitzPatrick, Jenni Minto, Natalie Don, Graeme Dey, Gillian Martin, Emma Roddick, Paul McLennan and Siobhian Brown be appointed as junior Scottish Ministers.

14:58

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): On behalf of the Opposition, I congratulate the First Minister and his new ministerial team. Humza Yousaf has made history, this week, and we offer him our very best wishes.

If the Parliament confirms his Administration today, I say "Good luck" to his new ministers, because judging by his performance at First Minister's question time they are certainly going to need it.

In particular, I welcome Shona Robison to the role of Deputy First Minister. Our country is now run by a woman who represents Dundee and a man who lives there. I say to the First Minister that it is a long way from Broughty Ferry to Bute house.

I do not know what experience the First Minister has of assembling flat-pack furniture, but I think that even Christine Grahame would have been surprised at just how quickly his Cabinet fell apart the other day. Mr Yousaf said that he wanted to build a Cabinet and a Government “of all the talents”, yet this translates—*[Interruption.]*. This translates into Kate Forbes leaving the Government while Lorna Slater is welcomed back into his ministerial team.

At the time for division, we will not support the formation of this new Government, which includes a Minister for Independence, who, in a cost of living crisis, will be earning £100,000 a year. *[Interruption.]* This is a Cabinet and a Government that are cast in Humza Yousaf’s image—failed continuity ministers appointed by a failed continuity First Minister. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Excuse me. Can we hear only the member who is standing up to speak. Do continue, Mr Hoy.

Craig Hoy: While we are talking about image, I say that I have noticed that there is something a little bit different about the First Minister this week. Is it the hair? Is it the suit? I think and sense that there is a make-over in the making. We know that Humza Yousaf likes to dress for the occasion—*[Interruption.]*—with a ScotRail hat when he is driving a train, surgical scrubs when he is in a hospital and a hard hat when he is on a building site. Some in the press gallery have likened him to Mr Bean, but it is increasingly clear that he is not like Mr Bean, but is like Mr Benn. Those of us who are old enough will remember that Mr Benn had many costumes. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, members.

Craig Hoy: Mr Benn emerged as a zoo keeper, a pirate and, of course, a clown.

As the First Minister assembled his new Government, there was soul searching among some longer-serving SNP MSPs—the dispossessed and the never possessed, including Emma Harper, Willie Coffey, Colin Beattie, Stuart McMillan, James Dornan, John Mason and, of course, Kenny Gibson. They were all scratching their heads and asking how someone with such obvious limitations had reached the highest office in the land, especially when they have failed to reach the first rung on the ministerial ladder. Sadly, there is no room in the First Minister’s Government for his leadership rival, Ash Regan, who has been snubbed and is, no doubt, reconsidering where she would like to stick her independence thermometer.

Looking to the back benches, I note the absence of the former First Minister. She will, however, be a very powerful back-seat driver. I remind the First Minister that Nicola Sturgeon is

taking driving lessons, so I hope that he does not get too comfortable behind the wheel. I hope that when she passes her test—as, I am sure, she will—the First Minister will be the first to offer his congratulations, and to remind her of the importance of car insurance.

Scotland’s new First Minister cannot simply airbrush away the criticisms that have been levelled by his colleagues. Kate Forbes was correct that “Continuity won’t cut it”, but it is continuity that runs through the core of his Cabinet. The only substantive change is in relation to national health service recovery, which is a frank admission of the failure of the previous holder of that office.

To govern is to choose. Humza—*[Interruption.]*.

Members: It is “Humza”, not “Hoomza”!

Craig Hoy: Humza Yousaf wants to be the first activist. *[Interruption.]*

The First Minister: Try again!

Craig Hoy: He wants to be the first activist. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear Mr Hoy.

Craig Hoy: At the same time, he wants to be the First Minister for all of Scotland, but he cannot be both. He has to be one or the other. We all know that tough choices will have to be made by his Government, but I fear that this SNP-Green coalition is no more than more of the same—the same misplaced priorities and the same failed ministers.

Although, for the sake of the country, we wish this Government well, we will not vote for it today.

15:03

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): On behalf of Scottish Labour, I welcome colleagues who are new to their places on the Government benches. I give a special mention to Natalie Don, who I believe will make history by becoming the first former Gryffe high school pupil to become a minister; I hope that she is not the last. I am sincere in wishing them all well.

On Monday, team Humza was disbanded, and we were promised that we would get team SNP today. However, I have to say that it looks an awful lot like team Humza. Despite the fact that more than 40 per cent of SNP MSPs will now be ministers, we in fact have more Green ministers in this Government than ministers who, in the end, publicly backed Kate Forbes or Ash Regan.

The top of the ticket looks a lot like team Nicola without Nicola. We have Michael Matheson as Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care—presumably to help the health

service recover from the actions of the former health secretary.

The Government is also now without Kate Forbes, Ivan McKee, Ben Macpherson, Clare Haughey and even the SNP's deputy leader, Keith Brown. I wish them all well on the back benches—there is life after ministerial office.

Despite those departures, we now have the biggest devolved Government ever, with 28 ministers. A ministerial salary bill of nearly £3 million per year will now be footed by the taxpayer. Scottish Labour will oppose the appointments when we vote on them. To be clear, that is not because of personal objection to any individual but because we believe that the change that Scotland needs is not bigger government but better government. We do not believe that the public will have confidence in replacing the most incompetent and wasteful Administration in the history of devolution with an even bigger one.

However, we recognise that those ministers will be appointed today, and will be charged with both responsibility and opportunity—which I hope they will grasp. That is because, today, after 5,810 days of the SNP having been in power, so many people in Scotland need them to do their jobs. They include: the children and young people who hope for a better life but fear that their potential will not be realised; the older people and the ill who live with chronic conditions, who find that our health service just does not have the time and resources to help them; the vulnerable people who live with drug problems, who see others dying around them, in higher numbers than in any other part of Europe; the hard-working people who do difficult jobs and who, at the end of their shifts, somehow still struggle to make ends meet; and the islanders who are just looking for ferries and not another ferries minister. I wish the ministers well. Their predecessors have bequeathed them an overflowing in-tray.

However, why are we here if we do not believe that we can do something about that? Scottish Labour members will work with ministers on the issues that I have mentioned, provided that they are prepared to roll up their sleeves and want to find practical solutions to Scottish problems. The question is: will they? The truth is that, today, Scotland stands at a crossroads. The Salmond and Sturgeon era is over, and there is an opportunity for something different and something better. Will this be a continuity Cabinet, or will the SNP have a group of people in office who are not prepared to accept mediocrity? Too many of those ministers' predecessors failed because their first loyalty was to the cause and not to the people of Scotland. They sought to exploit Scotland's problems rather than fix them. That approach was

not only wrong; it failed to deliver independence, and it failed the people of this country.

Presiding Officer, we are not naive. SNP ministers will still be united by a belief that independence is the best constitutional settlement for Scotland. I disagree, but I recognise their conviction. However, I also hope that they recognise that, in this moment, we should make the Parliament work for the Scottish people. Nicola Sturgeon can celebrate her eight election victories and her record as Scotland's longest-serving First Minister; those are great achievements. Yet, I believe that she will come to regret the road not taken: putting Government and Parliament to work as a policy engine that can deliver real change for Scots.

One of those not being appointed today recently said, "Continuity won't cut it." We agree. People in Scotland are hungry for change. Scottish Labour is hungry for change. I hope that the ministers who are appointed today are, too.

15:08

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): I congratulate Humza Yousaf on his appointment as First Minister. As a health spokesperson, I have enjoyed working with him and hope that the incoming health team will be as good to work with as he was.

I thank all those who are departing the Cabinet and ministerial office, who have worked with us constructively over the past 18 months. We hugely value their contribution to our collective work.

Obviously, I am delighted to see Patrick Harvie and Lorna Slater being reappointed. The Bute house agreement has shown what we can achieve through collaborative politics and has seen key Green policies being put at the heart of Government. I look forward to their getting stuck into unfinished business, including: delivering permanent rent controls; creating our next national park; launching our desperately needed deposit return scheme; rolling out record-breaking funding for nature restoration and active travel; and, of course, releasing more beavers into Scottish wetlands.

No one will be surprised to hear how relieved I am that I get to keep George Adam with me in the Parliamentary Bureau. Not only has he provided me with a lot of support; I would not wish our terrible chat on anyone else.

I cannot gloss over Emma Roddick's appointment. She has absolutely smashed everything that she has turned her hand to. I say to her, "Well done. Yer mammy would be proud."

After the outrage that was expressed at First Minister's questions earlier today, I am sure that

Jamie Hepburn is looking forward to seeing who the Opposition parties will appoint as their shadow minister for independence. *[Interruption.]* I am sure that there will either be queues out the door or the post will be used as the party naughty step.

Congratulations to each and every one of the ministerial team, whether this is their first time or whether they are moving to a new role. This is a fresh start in government, but we are already seeing the same old rhetoric creeping in from other parties. I was hopeful that we could come to a place of agreeing that we need to elevate the debate that we have had over the past couple of weeks by disagreeing on the substance, not the people. We correctly call out the abuse that members receive on social media and agree that it is terrible but then go right back to lobbing the same personal attacks and insults.

We also rightly praised ourselves at the start of this session of Parliament for doing better on making the Parliament more representative of the outside world. This is the first female-majority Cabinet and the first Muslim First Minister; it is a Cabinet that has young politicians and the youngest member of this chamber as a minister. Every international women's day, we say that we need to encourage women into politics, and more people who have different experiences from ours. How on earth are we going to do that when we are calling people "flops" or "B-list" before their names are even on the office door—before they have had a chance to pass even one policy? Can we please think and practise what we preach? By all means, scrutinise and debate where things have gone wrong, but members should talk about the ideas and argue why theirs are better, not why they believe that someone is any of the things that have been attributed to members of this Parliament in recent weeks.

I say to all the new ministers and cabinet secretaries that, with the Bute house agreement, we are here to offer constructive input and help to push them further. We are also here to support them. We have achieved a lot, but there is so much more to do: delivering a full ban on conversion practices and bringing in safe access zones around abortion clinics; developing the bold new climate plan that we desperately need if we are to have any chance of tackling the climate emergency; and beginning the long, slow task of restoring our land and seas through highly protected marine areas and nature restoration work. We are a team that is working on making Scotland better, and we have made progress on that over the past 18 months of the agreement. I know that all their families and friends will be so proud of them all and I cannot wait to see what we achieve together.

15:12

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western)

(LD): It is a great thing to serve your country in any way, but especially through ministerial office, so I will take a moment to congratulate those who have been so elevated and I offer thanks for the service of those leaving office today. Although we will not support the appointments, for reasons that I will come on to, I bear none of the appointees personal animosity. It is important to state that, given the eloquent words of Gillian Mackay.

Nicola Sturgeon was right to appoint a dedicated mental health minister in 2016. It was done at the request of my party, the Scottish Liberal Democrats. However, that focus was downgraded in 2021, when the minister was asked to cover social care, too. Is it any wonder that we have seen record delayed discharges and the mess that is the plan for a ministerial takeover of social care? Mental health is being further downgraded today because now sport is being added to that portfolio—another responsibility, which is hugely important in its own right. Mental health deserves better than to be sandwiched and squeezed between those other two portfolios.

We have just heard from Anas Sarwar in First Minister's question time about children waiting longer for care and treatment than Humza Yousaf served as health secretary—that is shocking. There is so much unmet need out there and mental health treatment targets have never been achieved—not once—for either children or adults since they were introduced in 2014. Nicola Sturgeon, Shona Robison, Jeane Freeman, Maureen Watt, Clare Haughey, Kevin Stewart and, yes, Humza Yousaf all talked a good game on mental health in this chamber, but none of them ever met their promise to the children and adults waiting years to be seen and, this winter, they cut £50 million from mental health—apparently oblivious to the crisis at our doors. By their actions shall you know them.

Is it any wonder that this Government is failing Scotland on mental health when there is no dedicated champion for mental health at the heart of Government to make the case for more investment and more staff?

There could have been a dedicated mental health minister, who would be a champion for the thousands of Scots who are waiting. Instead, the First Minister has expanded his ministerial team—which, as we have heard, is the biggest in the devolution era—to create an office for the Minister for Independence. That will take time, money and energy, as well as a team of expert civil servants who could have been focusing on mental health. Remember, Humza Yousaf made a personal promise to clear mental health waiting lists by this

March. Look at the calendar: we are here, and the SNP is nowhere.

Humza Yousaf said that he would be a leader for all of Scotland, but I do not see any evidence that he will be a First Minister for the people who are waiting for care and treatment. The appointment of a Minister for Independence is an insult to the thousands of people who the nationalists have failed. It is proof of the disconnect between the governing party's focus and the needs and interests of the country. The Scottish Liberal Democrats would reverse the cuts and re-establish a dedicated mental health minister. We would create mental health beds for young people in all parts of Scotland, when there are no beds north of Dundee. We would ramp up training so that every workplace can benefit from a mental health first aider. That is how the Liberal Democrats would create a properly funded, world-beating system to tackle Scotland's mental health crisis. That is a blueprint that shows what fresh thinking could achieve, why we need a change in Government and why it is essential that the Liberal Democrats are part of what is next.

Although we oppose the ministerial team's appointment this afternoon, I wish them good fortune, not least because we all have to live here and we all have to deal with the consequences of their decisions. I ask the ministers to make good choices. As Abraham Lincoln said,

"Put your feet in the right place, then stand firm."

That said, it is okay to get things wrong, but have the grace to admit when you are wrong and to listen to the voices from beyond members on your party benches that may offer a pathway through.

15:16

The First Minister: I can be relatively brief in my response. I say to Craig Hoy that a good start might be to know my name: it is Humza Yousaf, not "Hoomza" Yousaf. Thorough preparation such as that probably tells members why he is languishing on the Opposition benches. There have been lots of calls from across the chamber to bring back Jackson Carlaw; I saw that he was busy looking at his shoes at that point.

On a more serious point, during my time in the Parliament, I have often had people like Craig Hoy telling me that I am not good enough. They told me that when I became the first person of colour to win a constituency seat, they told me that when I became the first person of colour to be in government, and they told me that when I became the first person of colour to be appointed to Cabinet—so I am not surprised that they told me that when I became the first person of colour to be the First Minister of Scotland. It is because I do not

listen to people like Craig Hoy on the Conservative benches that I have been able to achieve what I have.

Neil Bibby was right to emphasise the need to work together in the national interest. Where there are constructive ideas, he will find that Government's door and my door will always be open and that we can come together. Where there are good ideas—I say that not just for when we are discussing the budget, but for any Government portfolio area—he will find that my door is open.

Gillian Mackay made the best speech of the afternoon, and I was delighted to hear her point about corrosive political discourse. We have all made statements about the corrosive nature of political debate. Our co-operation with the Green Party is a good demonstration of how we can do grown-up politics. The Green Party is our partner and it pushes us to go further, although we sometimes push back. However, we will make sure that we work in the spirit of co-operation for what is in the best interests of the country.

I am sorry that Alex Cole-Hamilton cannot see a link between social care, mental wellbeing and sport. We speak to many of our sporting organisations about the great work that they do to help and aid those who have mental health challenges. He will see that there is a natural linkage on many of those issues, which includes social care. It is quite something to be told by the smallest party in Parliament that we need to reflect the priorities of the people a little better.

I thank Opposition members for their remarks. This is a significant reshuffle, and the new team is very much a changing of the guard. I know that we have had a few laughs this afternoon, even at our expense, but everyone here agrees that, when the dust settles, all of the appointments have an exceptionally important job to do. I am sure that all members will wish them well in their new posts. On behalf of all ministers, I promise that we will do our best to work constructively with MSPs to deliver for the people whom we all represent. I hope that Parliament backs my motions today so that we can get down to work.

The Presiding Officer: There are two questions to be put. The first question is, that motion S6M-08469, in the name of Humza Yousaf, on the First Minister's appointment of Scottish ministers, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division. There will be a short suspension to allow members to access the digital voting system.

15:20

Meeting suspended.

15:23

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We move to the division on motion S6M-08469, in the name of Humza Yousaf. Members should cast their votes now.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer: The vote is closed.

Pam Duncan-Glancy has a point of order.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: I am sorry, Presiding Officer—I was too early there. The app would not connect. I would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Duncan-Glancy. 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)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)

Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Hindlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O’Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-08469, in the name of Humza Yousaf, on the appointment of Scottish ministers, is: For 71, Against 56, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that Jenny Gilruth, Màiri McAllan, Neil Gray and Angela Constance be appointed as Scottish Ministers.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-08470, in the name of Humza Yousaf, on the First Minister’s appointment of Scottish junior ministers, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

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

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

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)

Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O’Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-08470, in the name of Humza Yousaf, on the appointment of Scottish junior ministers, is: For 71, Against 56, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that Joe FitzPatrick, Jenni Minto, Natalie Don, Graeme Dey, Gillian Martin, Emma Roddick, Paul McLennan and Siobhian Brown be appointed as junior Scottish Ministers.

The Presiding Officer: As the Parliament has agreed to the First Minister’s recommendations, he may now invite His Majesty to approve the appointments.

I will allow a moment for members to take their seats for the next item of business and I ask members who are leaving the chamber to do so quietly.

Urgent Questions

15:29

Ferry Services (Mallaig, Oban and Lochboisdale)

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to restore ferry services between Mallaig, Oban and Lochboisdale in South Uist, in light of the announcement that the services are to be withdrawn from 5 April to 13 May.

The Minister for Transport (Kevin Stewart): Transport Scotland met CalMac Ferries earlier today, and it confirmed that it is doing everything possible to bring vessels back into service and minimise the period for which the Lochboisdale-Oban-Mallaig route is out of service. CalMac has also put in place mitigation by increasing services on the Barra to Eriskay route, to allow greater use of the services from Barra.

We recognise the real challenges that are being faced and we regret the disruption that is being caused to island communities and, of course, island businesses. However, it is important to note that the islands remain open for business and that CalMac is highlighting where there is capacity on secondary routes.

As members are aware, we have provided funding for the charter of the MV Alfred, which will enable additional resilience in the fleet when she comes into service, next month.

Graham Simpson: I welcome the minister to his new post. He is only minutes into the role, but he is not off to a good start. His answer will be of no comfort to islanders who will be without a ferry service to the mainland for five weeks. It is hard for those of us who live on the mainland to understand the impact of that, because most of us have choices for how we get about, no matter how bad the public transport is.

CalMac’s chief executive, Robbie Drummond, has referred to “a challenging period” that could go on for two years. It is worse than challenging—it is disastrous. With the holiday period looming, what will the minister be doing in his break to sort that out?

Kevin Stewart: I thank Mr Simpson for welcoming me to my new post. He and I have opposed each other in various roles in the Parliament previously, but, as he well knows, I will always do my level best.

What will I be doing over the next wee while? Today, I met Transport Scotland directors to discuss some of the most important issues that transport in Scotland faces. This afternoon, I will

speak with CalMac about the issue in question and other issues.

I recognise how important the ferry services are for our island communities—they are lifelines. As the chair of the North East of Scotland Transport Partnership in a previous life, I served on the northern isles lifeline ferry service committee. Therefore, I recognise the impacts that such things have on our island communities. I will do all that I can to ensure that CalMac gets it right for all our island communities, and members can be assured that I will continue to update everyone on how we are going about that.

Graham Simpson: I am not sure that any of that will be a comfort to islanders. However, to be fair to the minister, he has inherited a disaster.

Islanders and businesses on the Uists need help. Has the Government done any analysis of the impacts of the situation on the local community and the economy? Will the minister commit to looking at a compensation scheme for islanders and reduced fares on ferries that they can use while the crisis goes on?

Kevin Stewart: As I said in my earlier answer, my first course of action is to speak to CalMac this afternoon and hear what mitigations can be put in place. CalMac's announcement of the change has come as a shock to many—including the Government—and we have to ensure that communication is right between CalMac and our island communities.

I will speak to CalMac this afternoon and we will seek mitigations. I will seek solutions so that our island communities can get back to the normality that they should have. As always, I will, of course, continue to update Parliament on our efforts to achieve that for our island communities.

Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): I welcome the minister to his new post.

Today, I have been inundated with messages of despair from South Uist. It is a community that has suffered by far—I repeat, by far—the highest rate of cancellations of any island community over a period of months. For this to happen yet again, just as the Easter holidays are starting, is a devastating blow. Given what I have to call the frankly abysmal state of CalMac services to that particular community at present, will the Scottish Government consider putting in place either a business resilience fund or other specific measures for Uist?

Kevin Stewart: I fully sympathise, and I recognise the impact that this is having on South Uist. I also recognise that Alasdair Allan has been vociferous on the matter. The impact on his constituents will, no doubt, be challenging for

some, and the timing of this withdrawal is not the best, given the Easter period.

Scottish ministers need assurance from CalMac that this measure has been taken with full consideration of capacity and volume on alternative routes. It is important to note that CalMac has increased operations on the service from Eriskay to Barra and that there are other routes that enable people to reach South Uist. People should know that the island remains open for business, although car deck capacity on some routes might be pressured. As I said, I will meet with CalMac later this afternoon, and I will impress upon it the need to minimise any outage in this service.

On the point about the compensation scheme, I know that that has been discussed by the Lochboisdale business group with ministers and officials. I will need to consider it further, although our primary focus has to be on restoring services in order to minimise the impacts on business in the first place.

As always, I am more than willing to discuss these matters further with Alasdair Allan as the constituency MSP.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I, too, welcome the minister to his new post.

It is absolutely unacceptable that there will be no ferries from Lochboisdale for six weeks. Uist has already borne the brunt of recent disruptions. The mitigation put in place means that the small isles will also be left with only one ferry a week—again, that is absolutely unacceptable.

Disruption is now so common that the Scottish Government has devised a disruption management traffic prioritisation framework. The framework can cancel bookings and relegate hauliers to the end of the queue, making their businesses and the businesses that depend on them absolutely unviable.

Will the minister procure a freight ferry to bring into service for those periods? What assistance and compensation will he give to all those who are impacted? Or is he just another in a long line of failed transport ministers?

Kevin Stewart: That must be a record for a member basically saying that a transport minister has already failed, considering that I have not been in post for even 12 hours—or for 10 minutes, in reality.

I would say to Ms Grant quite simply that she is confused in some of her lines of questioning. The mitigation framework that she talks of—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, members!

Kevin Stewart: —has nothing to do with the Scottish Government; it is CalMac's.

I intend to have discussions this afternoon with CalMac around the measures that need to be put in place. I will talk to CalMac about the issues that are affecting islanders, and I will do everything that I can to ensure that CalMac does the job that it needs to do.

On the future procurement of ferries, as I have said, we have already brought in the MV Alfred.

I will be looking at this whole issue in some depth—as I know my predecessor, Jenny Gilruth, did—to find solutions that work for our island communities and to ensure that we have a ferry service that works for all.

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I hope that I am going to be of some help to the minister. In 2018, the Scottish Government set up a resilience fund of £3.5 million to hold fast-moving spares for ferries that broke down so that they did not have to be manufactured. The problem was that the transport minister at the time, Graeme Dey, repurposed that fund for something else. The following year, Michael Matheson, who was the transport minister at that time, repurposed it for another reason but said that it was being reinstated. Can the minister confirm that that money has been spent on holding spares and that those spares are in stock and available for use on the ferries? If he does not know the answers, I suggest that that might be where he starts with CalMac this afternoon.

Kevin Stewart: I am sure that that will be one of many topics of discussion with CalMac this afternoon, but, as my predecessor said, it holds that resilience fund. I will be questioning CalMac about that this afternoon, and I have to say that I will be questioning it about the currently unavailable ferries—which are the MV Caledonian Isles, the MV Clansman and the MV Hebridean Isles—to make sure that we get those ferries back into service as soon as possible.

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I heard the minister say that he is meeting CalMac and Transport Scotland. When is he going to meet the communities that are impacted by this? They are sick and tired of hearing new transport ministers make promises that are never delivered.

Kevin Stewart: I think that it is now 12 minutes since my appointment, and I have already met Transport Scotland—I did so this morning—and I will meet CalMac this afternoon. Of course, I will also be meeting communities the length and breadth of Scotland to talk about the transport issues that they face. Many members will recognise that, in all the ministerial roles that I have had, I have gone out of my way to listen to

the voices of lived experience because that is extremely important to me in ensuring that our policy decisions are the right ones. This job is no different, and I will speak to our island communities as well as to everybody else that our transport system impacts upon.

Police Scotland (Call Handlers)

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I welcome the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs to her new post.

To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reports that Police Scotland call handlers used a fake system for eight years.

Angela Constance: I am grateful to Mr Rennie for lodging that question. Although it is a matter for Police Scotland, any suggestion that callers to Police Scotland were not having their calls properly prioritised is clearly unacceptable. I have assurances from Police Scotland that that historical practice was limited to a single regional force and that it is no longer in use anywhere in Scotland and has not been since 2015. Police Scotland call handling has been completely overhauled since the creation of a single national service and policing continues to be a priority for this Government.

Willie Rennie: The Scottish Police Federation warned about the dumping of SC06 calls at the time, so the Government should have known about the issue. Back in 2015, I also raised the alarm repeatedly about the failings of the newly centralised Police Scotland. Those systematic failings led to the tragic deaths of Lamara Bell and John Yuill, but we were not told that call handlers used a fake system with a fictitious call sign. It was used to hide the chaos, and anxious members of the public had their calls ignored. The call sign was DUMY. Did ministers or officials know about call sign DUMY?

Angela Constance: I say very directly to Mr Rennie that I am not aware of any information that suggests that ministers were advised of that at the time. In terms of the issue at hand, my officials in the police division have discussed the issue, as you would expect, directly with the relevant Police Scotland division. Police Scotland has stated that, although the call sign existed, it was used when calls were at a peak so that they could be put into a holding system until they could be dealt with. Police Scotland does not believe that any calls were dropped due to its use. That said, Police Scotland makes it clear that it is not an acceptable approach at this time.

With regard to the tragic and painful loss of life on the M9 to which Mr Rennie referred, I say directly to him that Police Scotland has given my officials categorical assurances that the historical

call-handling issue is not related to the tragic death of Mr Yuill and Ms Bell. A fatal accident inquiry is about to commence soon with regard to that matter, and I cannot add any further comment on it at this stage.

Willie Rennie: I am afraid that this is the culture that the Government has established—to spin and manipulate to avoid the truth coming out. That response also lays bare the abject failure of governance, because the Scottish Police Authority should have spotted the issue. Will the cabinet secretary now commit to wholesale reform of the governance arrangements for the police service?

Angela Constance: I know that, when it comes to the creation of a single national police force, Mr Rennie and I sit on different sides of the fence. I hope, however, that, in view of the contact that he has had with me over a range of portfolios for a number of years—neither Mr Rennie nor I are new to this place—he will appreciate that I am very strong and focused on governance and accountability.

Police Scotland must be one of the most scrutinised public services in Scotland, and rightly so. I point to the fact that, on issues in and around call handling, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland produced several reports—starting in 2015, with the most recent report in 2022—with clear recommendations that have been implemented.

I look forward to continuing to engage with Mr Rennie on that and many other matters.

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): I, too, welcome the cabinet secretary to her new role.

I recognise that the call-handling system in question is a legacy service that was permanently deleted in 2015. However, as the new cabinet secretary has just alluded to, that will be of little comfort to those people who have been personally affected by the revelations.

As the cabinet secretary takes on her new post, what steps will the Scottish Government take to ensure transparency, maintain public confidence and build increased public trust in policing?

Angela Constance: I thank Ms Nicoll for her comments and look forward to being held to account at future appearances at the Parliament's Criminal Justice Committee, which she convenes.

I start by reiterating something that I said to Mr Rennie, which is that Police Scotland is—entirely rightly—one of the most scrutinised public services in Scotland. I will continue to work with the Scottish Police Authority, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland, the Police Investigations and Review Commissioner as well as other national and local bodies and, of

course, this Parliament, to support and challenge Police Scotland to ensure that we maintain an excellent standard of policing for all our communities.

Along with the investment of nearly £1.5 billion in policing in the coming financial year of 2023-24, I expect to introduce the police complaints and misconduct handling bill to Parliament later this year.

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): I welcome the cabinet secretary to her new position.

The problem is that two of her justice predecessors still hold two of the highest offices of Government, and many questions about the issue remain unanswered. The cabinet secretary has said that call handling has improved, but the reality is that, last year, hundreds of thousands of calls to Police Scotland went unanswered or were dropped by the caller.

Around the revelation—I should add that it is a scandal—has anyone gone back in time to review what happened to those calls that went into the ether? What was the exact consequence of not dealing with those calls? More importantly, can we get categorical reassurance from the new cabinet secretary that that practice did, indeed, end in 2015 and has not happened once since then? Serious questions remain unanswered, and someone must pay the price for that scandal.

Angela Constance: I appreciate why Mr Greene and other members have raised this matter, which is, of course, serious. Without repeating in full the comments that I made earlier to other members, I refer him to the explanation that has been given for the situation, which is that the call sign existed and was used when call numbers were at a peak so that calls could be put into a holding system until they could be dealt with. Police Scotland has said that it is clear that calls were not dropped due to that. However, as members would expect, I am due to meet the chief constable shortly, and this is one of many matters that will be on the agenda.

For brevity, I refer members to the several reports on the matter that have already been published, including early reports that made a number of recommendations on issues around staffing, systems and processes, as well as the 2018 follow-up report that recognised the considerable priority that had been placed on and effort that had been made in this area, plus the progress that had been made.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): I, too, congratulate Angela Constance on her appointment as Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that this is a very serious matter? The call centre system was designed to redirect 101 calls to make response times look better, and the BBC reported today that some calls went unattended as a result of that.

The cabinet secretary says that she is not aware that the practice existed in any other parts of the force. However, does she agree that Police Scotland should never again allow pressures to meet certain response times and targets to lead to such a practice?

Given that the chief constable, who is leaving Police Scotland, has pleaded with the Government to fund the police to ensure that the 101 service, which is a vital public service, continues to provide the best service that it can, will the cabinet secretary assure members that she will make sure that the 101 service will operate effectively and be adequately funded?

Angela Constance: I have reiterated to members throughout this afternoon's discourse that I consider this to be a serious matter, albeit one of historical practice. Nonetheless, it is imperative that we continue to govern, scrutinise and hold ourselves and one another to account, because there must be the strongest possible confidence in our police force and all related practices.

On funding, I have already intimated that we will invest nearly £1.5 billion in policing, which is a resource increase of 6.3 per cent, or £80 million. As Ms McNeill will appreciate, I will scrutinise that budget with great care and detail as we move forward.

Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): I, too, welcome the cabinet secretary to her new role.

A senior police officer has told the BBC that he was instructed by Police Scotland to investigate the matter. He produced a report, but no one knows where the report is. Will the new cabinet secretary, when she meets the chief constable, instruct or request a fresh search for that crucial document?

Angela Constance: As always, I appreciate Mr Findlay's deep interest in our criminal justice system on this and a range of matters. I will, indeed, meet the chief constable very shortly.

From the briefing that I have received from my officials and the extensive questions that I have already put to them, I am aware that there have been five reports on issues in and around call handling thus far. I therefore urge members to go back to and look at those reports and the recommendations that were made and to look at the progress that has been made. My door is always open to any supplementary information that needs to be drawn to my attention.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

15:54

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S6M-08474, on suspension and variation of standing orders. I ask George Adam to move the motion on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that, for the purposes of committee meetings taking place on Tuesday 18 April—

(a) in Rule 6.3A.1 after "member" the words "or members" be inserted;

(b) Rule 6.3A.2 be suspended;

(c) in Rule 6.3A.4 the first sentence be suspended.—
George Adam]

The Presiding Officer: The question on the motion will be put at decision time.

Motion without Notice

15:55

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): I am minded to accept a motion without notice, under rule 11.2.4 of standing orders, that decision time be brought forward to now.

Motion moved,

That, under Rule 11.2.4, Decision Time be brought forward to 3.55 pm.—[George Adam]

Motion agreed to.

Decision Time

15:55

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): There is one question to be put as a result of today's business. The question is, that motion S6M-08474, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on suspension and variation of standing orders, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that, for the purposes of committee meetings taking place on Tuesday 18 April—

(a) in Rule 6.3A.1 after "member" the words "or members" be inserted;

(b) Rule 6.3A.2 be suspended;

(c) in Rule 6.3A.4 the first sentence be suspended.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Meeting closed at 15:55.

This is the final edition of the *Official Report* for this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

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