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Wednesday 17 May 2023

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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 17 May 2023

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

Portfolio Question Time

Constitution, External Affairs and Culture

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): Good afternoon. The first item of business is portfolio question time, and the first portfolio is constitution, external affairs and culture. As ever, I make a plea for succinct questions and answers to allow as many members as possible to have their chance.

Question 1, in the name of Mark Griffin, was not lodged.

United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020 (Exemptions)

2. Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government whether the United Kingdom Government has communicated any intention to provide exemptions to the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020 in relation to legislation passed by the Scottish Parliament. (S6O-02229)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): The United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020 radically undermines the devolution settlement in Scotland and was imposed on this Parliament without its consent. We can see the outcome most clearly with the deposit return scheme—the bill that this Parliament passed is now threatened by the 2020 act, placing the whole scheme at risk, including significant industry investment. Regrettably, the UK Government has yet to reach a decision on excluding Scotland's deposit return scheme from the act.

We have been engaging with the UK Government on this issue for nearly two years now. UK ministers have acknowledged that we have followed the agreed exclusions process. We cannot wait any longer in providing businesses with the clarity that they urgently need. We need a positive decision from the UK Government, and we need it now.

Gillian Mackay: I have previously welcomed the creation of 140 new jobs in Motherwell as part of the DRS. Those are just some of the hundreds of jobs that are being created across Scotland as a result of the scheme. However, the jobs are now

at risk because of the UK Government's deliberate delay in excluding the scheme from the 2020 act.

Many other issues are being considered that might need such an exclusion, including a potential ban on disposable vapes. The common frameworks are meant to provide a forum for timely and collaborative decision making. Does the cabinet secretary agree that the DRS experience has shown those to be ineffective and that that could put at risk some of the public health and environmental measures that we are trying to take?

Angus Robertson: I agree with the member. The Scottish Government warned that the 2020 act would undermine devolution and that it would create confusion and uncertainty for businesses. Sadly, we have been proven right, as the example from the member's region shows.

Brexit has been used as a pretext for eroding devolution and the powers of the Scottish Parliament. The common frameworks offer one of the few options that are available to us for engagement on mitigating some of the effects of a Brexit that Scotland did not vote for.

The Scottish Government has spent a great deal of time trying to make common frameworks work as intended. We now need the UK Government to show a similar commitment to take full account of the work that has been undertaken collaboratively through the common framework, to agree to an 2020 act exclusion and to lift the threat of the act from Scotland's deposit return scheme.

Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary believe that the tensions arising from the 2020 act demonstrate that, under Westminster's control, Scotland's devolution settlement can be undermined at the whim of the UK Government, particularly by any hypothetical Secretary of State for Scotland who might harbour a scarcely concealed desire to act like a governor-general?

Angus Robertson: As I have noted, a Brexit that Scotland did not vote for is being used to roll back the powers of a Parliament that Scotland did vote for. The 2020 act, which was imposed on this Parliament without its consent, is the result. Despite that, we have acted in good faith to mitigate the act's worst effects, and we have been engaging through common frameworks to that end. That is what we are doing in respect of Scotland's deposit return scheme. We need the UK Government to finally recognise the evidence that has been gathered through the common framework, to agree to an exclusion and to remove the threat that the act poses to the scheme.

UK ministers have acknowledged that the Scottish Government has followed the agreed

procedure. The fact that we are still waiting for a decision shows the vulnerability of the devolution settlement and the ability of the Scottish Parliament to use its powers to benefit the people of this country.

Retained European Union Law

3. Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether it is considering replacing any retained European Union law. (S6O-02230)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): The United Kingdom Government's Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill is still reckless legislation, despite the sensible change that removes the automatic sunset of retained European Union law at the end of this year.

Vital protections remain at risk, and UK ministers can still act in devolved areas without a requirement for consent from Scottish ministers or from this Parliament. That is unacceptable, and that is why we continue to call for the bill to be withdrawn. We do not have plans to use powers in the bill to alter existing policy, but we continue to assess that as part of our on-going work, including to prevent laws from being lost.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: The cabinet secretary said in his statement on 9 May that the loss of Erasmus was a loss of opportunity for young people, and we know that it also is a loss to the economy. Although young people in England and Wales are accessing the replacement Turing and Taith schemes, young people in Scotland are still waiting, despite the Scottish National Party having committed in its 2021 manifesto to replace Erasmus. Does the cabinet secretary accept that this is yet another broken promise from the SNP to Scotland's young people?

Angus Robertson: I am sure that the Presiding Officer would not wish me to answer questions—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary, I am sorry to interrupt. I appreciate that the question seems to be a bit wide, but if there is anything else that you wish to add, perhaps as regards matters within your ministerial responsibility, you can do so.

Angus Robertson: The question that was put relates to retained EU law, and neither the Erasmus scheme nor the Turing scheme fall within the ambit of retained EU law. We will continue to work with partners, including members of the House of Lords, to do everything that we can to mitigate the threat of disaster that the retained EU law bill still poses. We do not know what will be the final outcome of that legislative process.

On the wider question that Pam Duncan-Glancy has asked, I am always happy to answer questions at the appropriate stage about how we can maximise educational co-operation between Scotland and the European Union.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 4 has not been lodged.

Culture and the Arts (Cunninghame South)

5. Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it is supporting culture and the arts in the Cunninghame South constituency. (S6O-02232)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): Our culture strategy sets out our ambitions for nurturing culture and creativity across all of Scotland's communities. We support a range of initiatives and organisations in the Cunninghame South constituency, including the Culture Collective programme, the youth music initiative and the Scottish Maritime Museum.

For example, Traditional Arts and Culture Scotland is supported through the Culture Collective and is delivered by Creative Scotland. TRACS brings together artists and people in local communities; one area of its focus is Kilwinning, in North Ayrshire. TRACS has received £345,000 in total to support projects across nine communities.

Ruth Maguire: Many barriers prevent our citizens—particularly families on lower incomes—from accessing arts and culture, whether it is lack of expendable time, distance from events or festivals or affordability. How can the Scottish Government ensure that public money that is invested in arts and culture is used for the benefit of all, whether those who are attending or performers and artists who are creating outwith the main cities?

Angus Robertson: Ruth Maguire raises an excellent point, and one that is central to the work that we are doing. Our major cultural programmes actively work to break down those sorts of barriers.

Our youth music initiative, which recently celebrated its 20th anniversary, operates across the country in rural and urban areas. It aims to tackle inequality and to engage young people who would not otherwise be able to participate in meaningful and high-quality music-making opportunities. Our Culture Collective programme, which has been funded by more than £10 million to date, has provided free, engaging, community-focused activity across the length and breadth of the country. Over the past two years, it has focused on access and participation. Later this year, we will publish a refresh of our culture

strategy action plan, which will provide much more detail about our ambitions in that space.

Arts Sector (Support)

6. Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on how it is supporting the arts sector. (S6O-02233)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): I understand that this is an incredibly worrying time for the culture sector. The Scottish Government continues to provide significant support to the sector. That includes funding to Creative Scotland totalling £35 million for its regularly funded organisations, more than £9 million for youth projects and more than £2 million for festivals. The Scottish Government has committed to maintaining the £22.496 million of funding for the five national performing companies and £3 million for the Victoria and Albert museum in Dundee. The Scottish Government is providing an additional £2.1 million to support increased costs in the national collections, reflecting the high fixed costs that those organisations have.

Sharon Dowey: The arts sector plays a crucial role in promoting cultural expression and creativity and in bringing people together in communities. In the Scottish National Party's 2021 manifesto, it pledged to create a new £2 million fund for public artwork. Seven months ago, I asked when that would happen, but no information was provided. Will the cabinet secretary give more detail on what the pledge actually means and when the commitment will be met?

Angus Robertson: I have just given Sharon Dowey an overview of the level of financial commitment right across the arts and culture piece. She asked a very specific question, and I would be happy to write to her to update her on progress in that area. However, I hope that she is assured that the Scottish Government is committed to supporting arts and culture right across Scotland, including in the area that she has highlighted.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Several members are seeking to ask a supplementary question. I intend to take all of them.

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): With the summer festivals season approaching, Scotland's cities are gearing up for a busy and vibrant few months, kicking off with the fantastic Nuart Aberdeen festival of street art, which begins on 8 June. What role does the cabinet secretary see culture and the arts playing in Scotland's on-going pandemic recovery?

Angus Robertson: Culture can play an important role in the recovery from the pandemic.

We know that participation in cultural and creative activity supports our wellbeing, not only at individual level but across our communities and for the country as a whole. That is why I am pleased to confirm the on-going support for the cultural sector. In the past year, Creative Scotland has provided £7.73 million in funding to festivals across Scotland, through its regularly funded organisations and through its open fund. In addition, Edinburgh and Glasgow festivals have received £3 million from the expo and place funds.

Another important aspect of our cultural life is our built heritage. This morning, I was delighted to confirm, together with Historic Environment Scotland, the silver city heritage and place programme with Aberdeen City Council. The programme will bring great benefits, particularly in the regeneration of the east side of Union Street, which has high levels of vacancy. I think that that will make a huge difference to people in Aberdeen.

Foysoyl Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): The Covid-19 pandemic has hit the culture and arts sector hard. Cherished and well-respected arts venues such as the Filmhouse in Edinburgh have been forced to close. Other venues such as Leith theatre are in disrepair due to a lack of support and funding. What funding can be allocated to such struggling venues to avoid Scotland's valued arts venues closing for good?

Angus Robertson: I am sure that I will get into difficulty with the Presiding Officer if I repeat the statistics that I read out at the beginning of this interchange with colleagues. The Scottish Government has multimillion pound commitments to the arts and culture sector, which is hugely important, and there is agreement across the chamber that that is worth while.

Foysoyl Choudhury hits the nail on the head when he highlights that there are significant challenges to cultural institutions, particularly venues. That applies here as well as elsewhere in the United Kingdom and internationally. It is a challenge for all of us—the artistic organisations in question, venue management, our arm's-length organisation Creative Scotland, which is responsible for working directly with arts organisations, and the Scottish Government, which wants to ensure that we protect as many of our venues as possible.

I assure Foysoyl Choudhury and other members that we are looking extremely closely at everything that we can do to ensure that the arts and culture infrastructure, including the institutions that he has mentioned, can continue and can thrive in the future. I remain seized of that, and I know that the same will apply to him.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): With high costs of travel and fewer

accommodation options, islands and rural Scotland are expensive places for artists to visit and perform. Post-pandemic, there has been a loss of creative outlets and funding options have reduced. Therefore, how best can the Scottish Government work with local communities to ensure that rural and island areas continue to attract artists, productions and events to their areas?

Angus Robertson: As an introduction to my answer to Beatrice Wishart, I say that I am sure that she would recognise that we are fortunate that Creative Scotland funds regularly funded organisations right across Scotland, including in our island communities. That is hugely worth while.

It is important to stress that Creative Scotland's grant priorities are aimed at supporting culture and the arts throughout Scotland. I know that Creative Scotland is doing a lot of active thinking about how it can give maximum financial assurance to the creative and arts sector on a multi-annual basis so that people are able to plan. That includes plans for performing in different parts of the country, whether that involves people going to Shetland or people from Shetland performing elsewhere in Scotland. I agree with Beatrice Wishart that that is hugely important. I am sure that Creative Scotland will listen closely to the points that she has made, and I am happy to underline them when I next meet Creative Scotland.

Independence (Policy Prospectus)

7. Ash Regan (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has to review its prospectus for an independent Scotland, in light of reported divisions within the independence movement. (S6O-02234)

The Minister for Independence (Jamie Hepburn): As set out in the First Minister's recent policy prospectus, "Equality, opportunity, community: New leadership—A fresh start", the people of Scotland will be given the information that they need to make an informed choice about whether Scotland should become an independent country. The Government will build the case for a thriving and socially just independent Scotland.

Ash Regan: Many people across the United Kingdom will be looking at their household bills, including their power bills, and at the problems that the UK faces, and many people in Scotland will be considering and, indeed, concluding that an independent Scotland is more important than ever. With that in mind, a cohesive, vibrant, creative and cross-party wider movement is important. It is important in designing a successful campaign, in presenting a united front and in going on to win majority public support for independence. Does the minister agree not only that establishing an

independence convention is imperative but that there is an urgent need to do so now?

Jamie Hepburn: I agree with the point that the member made about the urgent requirement for Scotland to become an independent country. My task is to make the Government's case through the series of prospectus papers that we will lay out. Three have already been published, and there will be more to come. That is the activity that I will undertake. Those papers will be laid before the people and will be a key part of making the case to the wider public.

When I take the temperature of the independence movement at the moment, I get a real sense of unity of purpose and a determination to work collaboratively towards that goal. I intend to play my part in that regard.

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I take this opportunity to warmly welcome the Minister for Independence to his new post. I know that he will work very hard on a subject that is clearly not a priority for the Scottish people right now.

It is obvious from recent weeks that divisions in the independence movement have been trumped by divisions in the Scottish National Party. We have been treated to an internal melodrama of back-bench rebellions and infighting. On that note, the minister's colleague Joanna Cherry recently described the Scottish Government's independence papers as "lightweight". Does he agree with her?

Jamie Hepburn: I thank Mr Cameron for his overdue warm welcome—it was certainly warmer than those that I have heard thus far.

It is an interesting perspective to say that we are not able to make the case for independence. The Government was, of course, elected on the platform of advancing that case. We have published three, I believe, compelling prospectus papers, and I can tell Mr Cameron that I intend to publish many more in the coming months.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): What budget does the Minister for Independence have, and how many civil servants work directly to him?

Jamie Hepburn: That question has been put to me in written form by a number of members. Only one civil servant—my private secretary—works directly to me. However, it is incumbent on civil servants across the entire Government to respond to the Government's priorities, of which independence is one. In that regard, the civil service is working towards our agenda.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): We should be grateful to Ash Regan for genuinely and honestly referring to the divisions in the independence movement. However, she has been

incredibly creative, with her most interesting suggestion being that estranged friends should be brought in from the cold. Will the Minister for Independence be seeking advice from former First Minister Alex Salmond when crafting his new prospectus?

Jamie Hepburn: I will be working with dedicated civil servants to craft the prospectus papers.

Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP): I am sure that the minister will agree that one of the many strengths of the 2014 campaign was the wide range of organisations that were part of the yes movement at that time and continue to be so. What is the Scottish Government doing to engage with organisations in the wider yes movement in the development of those prospectuses?

Jamie Hepburn: I am in regular contact with a range of organisations. I am happy to engage with any organisation with an interest in the future of Scotland whether or not they support independence because, at the end of the day, the future of the country is everybody's business.

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Discussions)

8. Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office regarding the reported communiqué to United Kingdom ambassadors and diplomats and their involvement in the Scottish Government's international engagements. (S6O-02235)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): I have written to the Foreign Secretary to ask him to withdraw that guidance, which will damage Scotland's interests and undermines devolution. More than two weeks later, I have yet to receive a reply, which says everything about the disrespect that the UK Government has shown thus far.

Despite what those documents assert, nothing in the Scotland Act 1998 precludes Scottish ministers from discussing any issue with other Governments or international organisations. On that basis, I had a successful visit to Vienna this week, promoting Scotland's energy and space sectors, our commitment to human rights and the rule of law and our work to achieve net zero. As ever, I was grateful for the positive and constructive support provided by the FCDO in capital, both from the embassy to Austria and the mission to the United Nations.

Bill Kidd: As the cabinet secretary has intimated, condescending Westminster attitudes could cost real jobs and investment, such as that

which the Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy announced on his recent visit to Japan of plans for a subsea cable factory in the Highlands, which will bring much-needed jobs to that region and across Scotland.

Westminster is endangering direct foreign investment, which rose in Scotland by 14 per cent last year in comparison with 1.8 per cent across the UK.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that we should all get behind Scotland's businesses and economy instead of meekly accepting the Westminster Government's blatant contempt for Scottish interests?

Angus Robertson: I thank the member for raising a vital reason why ministers travel overseas—namely, to secure investment and jobs for people in Scotland. My cabinet colleague Neil Gray was in Japan last month, when there was the announcement from Sumitomo, which demonstrates the strength of confidence that investors have in our vision for a net zero economy.

We have a world-beating pipeline of offshore wind projects and the visit demonstrated the important role that Scotland's international network plays and the value of growing and developing relationships with our partners around the world. The Government will therefore continue to promote Scotland's interests and fight attempts to undermine devolution.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions on constitution, external affairs and culture. There will be a very brief pause before we move to the next portfolio to allow front-bench teams to change position.

Justice and Home Affairs

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next item of business is portfolio questions on justice and home affairs. Again, I make a plea for succinct questions and answers in order to be able to take as many members as possible.

Policing of Protests

1. Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with Police Scotland regarding any changes to the policing of protests. (S6O-02236)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): I regularly meet the chief constable and his team and there have been no discussions regarding change to the policing of protests.

Although significant change to the legislation concerning public order policing in England and Wales has taken place recently, those provisions do not extend to Scotland and we have no plans to make any changes to the policing of protests here. Scotland has a proud tradition of peaceful protest, and the Scottish Government is committed to uphold the democratic right to peaceful public assembly.

Ariane Burgess: There was widespread anger at reports of heavy-handed policing of peaceful protest at the coronation. The cabinet secretary's reassurances about support for peaceful protest here in Scotland are especially welcome following the disgraceful Public Order Act 2023 in England and Wales, which Labour now says it will keep on the books if it is in government. Does the cabinet secretary agree that trashing the right to peaceful protest is yet another example of where Tories lead, Labour follows?

Angela Constance: The member makes a political point that I am, of course, compelled to agree with. The legislation that was passed in England has been described by some as draconian—a piece of legislation that clamps down on our basic democratic right to protest as an anti-protest law that can be used to stop the public from seeking even to hold placards in the street. By contrast, we in this Parliament will uphold people's right to peaceful protest, while always ensuring a balance between rights and responsibilities.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I am glad to hear the justice secretary confirm that there is no intention to go down the same route as the UK Government in that area, but as Ariane Burgess pointed out, there were concerns arising from the policing around the death of the Queen. There were also concerns in relation to the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26—about the use of stop and search powers and more general surveillance.

Therefore, has the cabinet secretary had, or does she intend to have, discussions with Police Scotland about data gathering, which could give us a greater sense of confidence that the human rights-based approach to policing by Police Scotland is being delivered in practice?

Angela Constance: Police Scotland is one of the most scrutinised public services in Scotland, and it has a clear track record and commitment to upholding human rights. The position of Police Scotland on policing protests is to engage, explain and encourage, and to do all that before ever reaching an enforcement stage. However, of course, as members would expect me to do, I will discuss data matters with Police Scotland to explore what would be proportionate and possible.

Michelle's Law Campaign

2. **Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what "concrete action" it anticipates taking on the proposals outlined in relation to Michelle's law, which were discussed in the debate on the Michelle's law campaign on 6 September 2018. (S6O-02237)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): The Scottish Government has already taken action in line with the Michelle's law campaign. We amended the Parole Board rules in March 2021 to make it clear that the board can take account of the safety and security of victims and families when deciding upon a prisoner's release.

In addition, individuals who are registered with the victim notification scheme are advised when a prisoner is first being considered for temporary release, and those who wish to can provide their views about that decision to the Scottish Prison Service. Victims can also make representations to the Parole Board for Scotland when someone is being considered for parole. Furthermore, the Parole Board can already set exclusion zones as a condition of parole licence, and parole licence conditions can include the requirement to be electronically monitored to stay away from a particular location or from named individuals, as well as the requirement to monitor that someone remains at a specified address at certain times.

Brian Whittle: I thank the cabinet secretary for the response. When you are sitting opposite a mother as she describes the unimaginable pain of losing her daughter to murder and how that is exacerbated by the murderer being allowed out of prison without her being notified and by the murderer's father being allowed to walk past her house so many times, the need for Michelle's law becomes a stark reality.

The Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill fails to introduce Michelle's law, despite Humza Yousaf previously promising action. Does the cabinet secretary agree that Michelle's law would give victims the reasons for a release decision in full and require—require—their safety to be considered in every case?

Angela Constance: I very much appreciate the issues that Mr Whittle has raised in this regard and how different parts of the justice system can retraumatise victims. However, I hope that he would accept that a change to the Parole Board rules, which are rooted in law, is a change in legislation.

Of course, there is always more to do. In Parliament, we are currently at stage 2 of the Bail and Release from Custody (Scotland) Bill, through which we hope that there will be improvements to the victim support system. In the not-too-distant

future, we will also of course be debating the Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill. There will therefore be ample opportunities for Mr Whittle and others to bring forward further improvements as required.

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): I was very pleased to see victims at the heart of the recently introduced Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill. How will the cabinet secretary ensure that both victims and their families are supported to stay involved in the bill's passage through Parliament?

Angela Constance: The bill has, indeed, been shaped and developed through engagement and consultation with victims and witnesses, who have had the courage and bravery to share their experiences. I have been clear that I will continue to engage with victims directly as well as through channels such as the victims task force, victims advisory board and Rape Crisis Scotland's survivor reference group. I am sure that victims and witnesses and their families and advocates will also make their views known to Parliament as the bill progresses.

Youth Antisocial Behaviour

3. **Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to tackle youth antisocial behaviour. (S6O-02238)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): We support local agencies to reduce antisocial behaviour and are investing in prevention and early intervention. Local agencies are well placed to deal with those issues and have a wide range of powers to tackle antisocial behaviour, including—where appropriate—warnings and formal measures such as fixed-penalty notices and antisocial behaviour orders. As part of our broader support for prevention, we are developing a new youth work strategy so that all our young people reach their potential. Between 2023 and 2026, we are committing £20 million through the cashback programme to support more than 33,000 young people in communities around Scotland.

Alasdair Allan: Nobody, not least the elderly, should have to put up with harassment or intimidation. Sometimes, due to the age of the apparent offenders, it ends up being a multi-agency issue, as the cabinet secretary mentioned. There is sometimes a perception, including among some offenders, that little can be done to challenge them. What more can the Scottish Government do to help the police, social workers and schools work together with children, particularly those in the 12 to 16 age group?

Angela Constance: Alasdair Allan is right to be concerned about the impact of antisocial behaviour on some of his most vulnerable constituents. However, I want to reassure him and others that something can be done to address those issues on a multi-agency basis.

I am aware that a specific group has been established in the Western Isles, involving key partners. I also understand that the local children's services have been developing plans to divert more young people in the area away from criminalisation and that they are preparing a bid for additional funding. I also know that there are four partners in phase 6 of cashback for communities—Ocean Youth Trust Scotland, Access to Industry, Youth Scotland and the Scottish Football Association—that are all focused on diverting young people who are at risk of participating in antisocial behaviour.

Of course, enforcement measures are also available, including talking to parents and issuing those formal warnings, and acceptable behaviour contracts and antisocial behaviour orders may also be considered for children over the age of 12.

Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): Retailers Against Crime told me about two Lanarkshire teenagers who are using free bus travel to inflict chaos in shops across the country, with a particularly horrific attack in Edinburgh leaving staff injured. Glasgow Chamber of Commerce previously raised concerns that free bus travel for under-22s is fuelling some antisocial behaviour. Shop workers are therefore asking this very specific question: will the cabinet secretary consider finding a way to remove free bus passes from the small number of people who abuse them?

Angela Constance: I am advised that transport colleagues will be undertaking a full review of the free entitlement. However, it is important to acknowledge that it is a national entitlement for all young people for very good reasons.

Our focus should always be less on the mode of transport—notwithstanding the work that is done across agencies to ensure the safety of people who work in public transport, as well as of the citizens who travel on public transport—because we need to get to the root causes of such behaviour. There are a number of well-proven, well-evidenced approaches to diverting young people away from criminal activity and antisocial behaviour, as I have already mentioned.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): I echo Alasdair Allan's key point. It is undoubtedly a fact that there has been an uptick in such antisocial behaviour in my constituency, ranging from egg throwing to the assaulting of security guards at fast food outlets, which I have had to

deal with. Are any additional measures and consequences for such action being considered? Although no one wants to lock people up and throw away the key, there is a feeling, as Alasdair Allan pointed out, that much of the behaviour in question has no consequences.

Angela Constance: Mr Johnson raises an important point. Although the overall statistics on antisocial behaviour do not show an increase, we must be fully cognisant of the fact that antisocial behaviour is often underreported. The Government is undertaking work with the Scottish Community Safety Network to explore what the appetite is for, and what the benefits would be of, revisiting some of our past, more formalised approaches and whether there is a need to review those. If Mr Johnson wishes to write to me, I will keep him fully informed of how we progress with that.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): So far, Glasgow City Council has unanimously agreed that putting lights in parks is the right thing to do to help to address antisocial behaviour. Meanwhile, many people are still afraid, and the council has said that it will take years to do that. Does the cabinet secretary think that the installation of lights in parks could help? What more can the Government do to help to move things along more quickly in Glasgow?

Angela Constance: I am always happy to engage with partners at a local level, and indeed MSPs, on what would assist in their local area. However, it is important to remember that the question of what solution is best, where, is often best determined at a local level. From my perspective, it tends to be the case that a range of solutions need to be brought to the table, because some of the causes and consequences of the issues in question are complex.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): Has the Scottish Government done any work to ascertain whether there is any connection between antisocial behaviour and cuts in funding for youth services?

Angela Constance: The Government is continuing to invest in youth services. I refer the member to my original answer to Dr Allan, in which I outlined the investment that is being made via cashback for communities, which will benefit 33,500 young people in Scotland.

Police Patrols (Public Perception of Frequency)

4. Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what work it has conducted to ascertain the public's perception of the frequency of police patrols in their local area. (S6O-02239)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): Scotland continues to be a safe place to live—the current level of recorded crime is among the lowest levels since 1974. Research shows that people in Scotland are significantly less likely to be victims of crime than people who live in England or Wales.

The Scottish crime and justice survey regularly has well-established questions that ask respondents for their perceptions of safety in their local area and of local policing. In 2019-20, 65 per cent of respondents agreed that police in their local area could be relied on to be there when they needed them, and 73 per cent agreed that crime in their local area was either the same or lower compared with two years previously. The latest findings will be published in autumn 2023.

Alexander Stewart: The Scottish National Party Government's crime and justice survey confirms that there has been a significant drop in the proportion of adults who were aware of police patrols in their area. In the year before Police Scotland was formed, 56 per cent of people said that they saw police regularly patrolling their area; by 2019-20, that figure had fallen to 37 per cent. A regular police presence reassures local communities and can often deter the committing of crime. Therefore, what action will the Government put in place to reduce the burden that Police Scotland is under and boost the police presence in our local communities?

Angela Constance: Policing continues to be a priority for the Government and we have ensured that there have always been year-on-year increases in funding.

I remind the member that 96 per cent of adults rated their neighbourhood as very or fairly good to live in, and that 84 per cent of adults continue to trust the police. Of course, public perception and the presence of police is important, but we also have to recognise that, given that the nature of crime is changing, how we police matters sometimes has to change with the times, under the stewardship of the chief constable.

I know that our police officers work very hard and do their utmost to respond quickly and efficiently, and to have a very visible presence.

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): The results of the Scottish household telephone survey that were published last month showed that 84 per cent of respondents trust the police, as the cabinet secretary just said, and that neighbourhood safety levels were rated highly. With that in mind, what steps is the Scottish Government taking to ensure that neighbourhood safety remains a priority?

Angela Constance: Neighbourhood safety is a central priority for the Government. We work for a

society in which people feel, and are, safe in their communities. To that end, we will continue with our transformative policies, including those outlined in "The Vision for Justice in Scotland" and our programme for government. In doing so, we will engage with a range of partners, including the emergency services and the wider community safety organisations to which I referred in an answer to Daniel Johnson, such as the Scottish Community Safety Network, Crimestoppers and Neighbourhood Watch Scotland, as well as local community safety partnerships.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 5 was not lodged.

Naloxone (Police Officers)

6. Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how many front-line police officers have been trained to use, and equipped with, naloxone. (S6O-02241)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): The Scottish Government recognises the vital role that emergency services play in providing and improving our response to drug overdoses. To date, 10,300 officers have been trained to use and been equipped with naloxone kits. As of today, Police Scotland has recorded 201 administrations of naloxone, which shows how crucial the intervention is in helping to tackle preventable deaths. I want to thank each and every officer who has carried and administered life-saving naloxone.

Gordon MacDonald: The roll-out of naloxone to front-line police officers began at last year's international overdose awareness day. Naloxone is an emergency first-aid treatment for use in potentially life-threatening overdose situations. When will the cabinet secretary see the results of the use of naloxone on the figures for overdose deaths?

Angela Constance: Many factors contribute to reducing overdose deaths, and the national statistics are published every year in the summer months. There have been 201 recorded incidents of police officers having administered naloxone, and they have done that in a wide variety of circumstances and locations. On all but seven occasions, the individuals survived their ordeal. On most occasions when the individual did not survive, the officer suspected that the person was deceased prior to police arrival, but the officer administered naloxone to give them the best possible chance of survival.

Once again, I thank Police Scotland for its leadership in the area and its front-line officers for playing their part to save lives.

Deaths at Work (Fines)

7. Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government how many fines have been issued by courts to companies for breaches of health and safety rules, resulting in workers' deaths, in the last five years. (S6O-02242)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): Information provided by the Crown Office indicates that, in the period 2018-19 to 2022-23, 164 companies have been convicted and fined for criminal breaches of health and safety law. Information relating to the number of specific health and safety cases in which a death has occurred is not available.

Mercedes Villalba: The Health and Safety Executive found that, of all the United Kingdom nations, Scotland has the highest rate of deaths in the workplace caused by fatal injuries, so it is highly concerning that no cases have been prosecuted in Scotland under the Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide Act 2007 despite 164 companies having been legally deemed responsible for workers' deaths. Although that law is reserved, will the Scottish Government review why those cases are not being brought as corporate manslaughter cases and how it can make that option more accessible for victims' loved ones?

Angela Constance: The member is correct in saying that that is concerning. Health and safety legislation is reserved, and the legislation to which she refers is United Kingdom legislation that was passed in 2007. Although the argument is progressed by some that that legislation acts as a deterrent, because it ensures that organisations are aware that they must meet a duty of care to employers and the public, I know that the member and some of her colleagues have narrated effectively how the legislation bypassed, in effect, what was then referred to as the Transco loophole, as opposed to closing the loopholes.

We will consider what more we can do within our powers in that area, in which I recognise that the member, along with Claire Baker, has a long-standing interest.

Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): The recent work by the Scottish Trades Union Congress and the Scottish Hazards group shows that we need to consider the best way to reform legislation in order to better allow negligent companies to be prosecuted. The enforcement of safe working environments is essential, and it is a disgrace that the UK Government has cut the Health and Safety Executive's budget by 40 per cent.

The Scottish Hazards group has stated that

“only full devolution of health and safety regulation allowing convergence with existing devolved powers ... will provide the necessary foundation for a health and safety system that protects workers and delivers justice for those impacted by health and safety failure.”

Does the cabinet secretary agree with that view?

Angela Constance: I very much agree with the member, given that the Smith commission considered giving this Parliament powers over health and safety but did not ultimately recommend it. I am aware that the STUC has said that that failure was “a missed opportunity” to allow this Parliament to shape how workers can be better protected. I am sure that many members would agree with that statement, and this Parliament would be able to do more to protect workers if those powers sat here.

Sexual Entertainment Venues (Nil Cap)

8. **Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the Court of Session’s ruling that a so-called nil cap for sexual entertainment venues under provisions in the Air Weapons and Licensing (Scotland) Act 2015 is unlawful. (S6O-02243)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): The Scottish Government delivered new powers through the Air Weapons and Licensing (Scotland) Act 2015, which enabled local authorities to set policy on sexual entertainment venues, taking into account views from stakeholders and the community. The judgment does not mean that a nil cap is unlawful; instead, the judgment made clear that the council ought to be aware of the impact of setting a nil cap in its area. In response, the council has delayed the introduction of a licensing scheme until 31 December this year and, prior to that, it will carry out a statutory 12-week consultation to review its licensing policy on sexual entertainment venues.

Sarah Boyack: When I previously raised the issue in the chamber, the minister’s predecessor was very supportive of the policy. Although there is now a consultation on-going, what steps will the minister and the wider Scottish Government take to make modifications to policy—and, if need be, to legislation—to ensure that our councils can lawfully implement nil caps, if that is their democratic decision after they have carried out consultation?

Angela Constance: I am very supportive of local areas carrying out local consultations and coming to a view on what is in the best interest of their area. If City of Edinburgh Council wishes to continue to pursue a policy of a nil cap and to follow due process, I will support that. I do not think that the issue in this instance relates to Government policy or legislation, but I am happy

to discuss the matter further. My door is always open to the member and others in that respect.

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): The Government has long recognised, through its equally safe strategy, that commercial sexual exploitation in all its forms is both a cause and a consequence of men’s violence against women. Can the cabinet secretary give an update on legislation to tackle male demand and end that violence?

Angela Constance: The member is right to make that connection. We must ensure that our work in the area aligns with the equally safe strategy. The Scottish Government continues to make progress in delivering on the programme for government commitment to develop a framework that effectively tackles and changes men’s demand for prostitution and to support those with experience of it.

Several aspects of the work in the equally safe strategy recognise commercial sexual exploitation as a form of violence against women and girls. A number of reforms and measures have been developed to underpin that work, and we will keep the member informed as we take it forward.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions on justice and home affairs. There will be a very short pause before we move on to the next item of business.

Bus Services

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-08954, in the name of Alex Rowley, on access to bus services. I invite members who wish to take part to press their request-to-speak button now or as soon as possible.

14:51

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): On the face of it, my motion for debate is about bus services, route cancellations, inflation-busting fare increases, a lack of investment and a failure of leadership, but, at its heart, my motion is about people who rely on the public transport system to get them to where they need to go. It is about people who get stranded on routes that get cancelled in the interests of shareholders. It is about people being failed by flawed approaches to bus services that hand public money and control to private interests.

In writing the motion, my intention was to instigate a balanced debate that I hoped members across the chamber could get behind, regardless of their party affiliation. That is why I am so disappointed by the Government amendment. It serves as an example of the blinkered approach that has led to the sorry state of bus services across the country.

Let us have a look at the motion and what the Government has removed in its amendment, which will get passed with the Greens' support. Let us have a discussion about who is interested in the environment and who is interested in getting people out of cars and on to buses, because it is certainly not the Green Party.

My motion notes the

"recent bus fare rises across the country that are hitting during a cost of living crisis".

The fact that the Government wants that removed suggests that it is in denial. Does it acknowledge that there have been major increases in bus fares across the country, and does it accept that, for many people who are on low incomes, that is a barrier to using buses?

The motion further notes that those fare rises

"come on the back of route cancellations across much of Scotland that are isolating communities."

Is the Government seriously saying that there have not been route cancellations in every community across Scotland? I am sure that there has been bus cancellation after bus cancellation in the communities of Scottish National Party and Green Party members, just as there has been in

our communities. That puts people off using buses.

Indeed, last week in West Lothian, two young people explained how they would both have to spend £40 on a Sunday to get a taxi, because of the bus route cancellations that have taken place. Young people told us that their first bus in the morning had been taken off, so they had to take taxis at £20 because, otherwise, they could not get to their work. Is the Government denying that routes have been cut? It certainly seems to be doing so. Let us look at the SNP amendment, which inserts the words

"supports the vision outlined in the policy prospectus, Equality, Opportunity, Community, for a public transport system that is more accessible".

The system is not more accessible, and the people who are suffering the most are the poorest.

The amendment goes on to talk about the under-22s and free travel for the over-60s but, in the middle, there is a group of people who are generally on much lower incomes, which is why they are not in their cars, and those people are being denied access to buses because of the costs. You really could not make it up—the Government is in denial. It is not just that the SNP Government is in denial but that it has no idea what to do to build a transport system that will deliver for all the people of Scotland.

At the weekend, one of its members said that the SNP is

"in office but not in power".

I would go further and say that it has no vision and is a clueless Government that is high on rhetoric, with no idea how to meet the big challenges that Scotland faces at this time. Record numbers of buses have been axed during its time in office, and the number of routes being axed is on the rise, so it is clear that the SNP's broken system is failing thousands of public transport users in Scotland, and it has no plan to fix it. Indeed, I repeat that the Government does not have a clue about how to begin to fix the problems that we have in Scotland.

Scottish Labour will launch the biggest reform of buses in a generation, end the SNP's broken system and hand power and control of routes, fares and services back to local communities and people who depend on those services. That is the direction of travel in which we need to go—

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Will Alex Rowley give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is just winding up.

Mr Rowley, you need to conclude at six minutes. You can take the intervention, but you will then need to conclude.

Alex Rowley: I apologise to the Green member for not being able to take the intervention, but perhaps he and others can start to examine their consciences and ask themselves why they deny that people are being excluded from buses because it is too expensive to use the buses. Why do they deny that many people are being excluded from buses because no buses are running in their area? What is the point of a free bus pass if there are no buses to get on? The Greens and the SNP Government have no vision, no clue and, time and again, will fail the people of Scotland on transport.

I move,

That the Parliament believes that reliable, accessible and affordable public transport is a key lifeline service in Scotland; believes that public investment in passenger transport should deliver value for money, environmental and social benefits; notes the recent bus fare rises across the country that are hitting during a cost of living crisis; further notes that these come on the back of route cancellations across much of Scotland that are isolating communities; believes that local authorities must be fully supported, empowered and resourced in their role regarding local public transport, and calls on the Scottish Government to support the introduction of a cap on bus fares across Scotland and set out what action it will take to stop the cuts to bus services on routes across Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: As I am sure that members will already have gathered, there is no time in hand, so speeches will have to stick to the time limit. I invite the minister to speak to and move amendment S6M-08954.3 for up to five minutes.

14:58

The Minister for Transport (Kevin Stewart): I welcome the debate on the motion. Mr Rowley said that he wanted a consensual debate, but his opening remarks did not sound consensual at all.

However, I agree with Mr Rowley that reliable, accessible and affordable public transport is a lifeline service for many people across Scotland, and that is the vision in the new “Equality, opportunity, community: New leadership—A fresh start” policy prospectus that the First Minister set out last month. Bus services play a vital role in supporting the delivery of the three missions that are set out in the prospectus.

The Scottish Government took significant action to ensure that bus services were protected during the pandemic, including through the provision of £223 million between June 2020 and March 2022. We continued the network support grant plus until March 2023 to freeze fares and to help people with the cost of travel over the winter. Our support continues in 2023-24 with a broad package of

investment in bus services—£421.8 million has been allocated, including through the network support grant and concessionary schemes. I was also pleased to launch the second phase of our co-funded marketing campaign with the Confederation of Passenger Transport UK and bus operators in Galashiels last week, to encourage people to choose the bus.

Our support for bus services takes a number of different forms. In particular, our national free bus travel schemes for young people and for older and disabled people are the most generous in the United Kingdom. The schemes cover a larger percentage of the population than anywhere else in the UK, with up to 2.6 million people eligible for free bus travel in Scotland. That is encouraging more people to choose the bus, and it is helping us to meet our net zero targets by encouraging a shift away from cars. It is a transformational policy, and we now have more than two thirds of young people enjoying free bus travel, representing a new cardholder every minute since the scheme launched in January 2022. Therefore, although I recognise members’ arguments in relation to capping fares, I hope that, in turn, they will acknowledge just how widespread and significant our free fares support has become.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): Will the minister give way?

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): Will the minister give way?

Kevin Stewart: I will give way to Liam Kerr, because he asked first.

Liam Kerr: Does the minister know exactly where the concentrations of people taking up the under-22s bus scheme are located?

Kevin Stewart: I will provide members with the details of where uptake has occurred. Off the top of my head, I do not have the numbers for each local authority area, but we will provide that information later, as I did to Ms Dowey in response to a question that she asked earlier this week.

The pandemic was not only a period of huge challenge for public transport but its impact continues to be felt in patterns of demand. Therefore, although the Scottish Government continues to provide significant financial support for bus services, that support needs to evolve to ensure that it remains fit for purpose and is sustainable in the long term. I have committed to a review of bus subsidy this year to ensure that funding can best contribute to meeting the needs of local communities.

We are progressing with the fair fares review, which will develop and assess options to make our public transport system more accessible, available and affordable, with the costs of transport more

fairly shared across Government, business and society.

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): Will the minister give way?

Kevin Stewart: I have a lot to get through, so I will not take the intervention.

Improving bus journey times and reliability will contribute to high-quality bus services and shorter journey times, encouraging motorists out of their cars and on to buses. That is why we are investing in bus priority infrastructure through our bus partnership fund. Awards totalling £26 million in bus priority funding have already been made to 11 partnerships, covering 28 local authorities.

It is not just how buses run that is changing with the powers that local authorities now have under the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 and with further secondary legislation to enable bus franchising and partnership working that is being introduced later this year. It is also about what is changing in relation to the buses themselves.

Removing carbon emissions from our transport sector is critical to meeting Scotland's ambitious climate targets. Since December 2020, we have directly supported the acquisition of 548 new zero-emission buses, and we are supporting charging infrastructure across Scotland. This week, I launched phase 2 of the Scottish zero-emission bus challenge, which will transform the market to deliver a zero-emission future for buses.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to conclude, minister.

Kevin Stewart: Thank you, Presiding Officer—I will.

I recognise just how important a modern, affordable and accessible bus system is for the whole of Scotland. I am impressed by the appetite shown by everyone involved in bus services to innovate and respond to changing needs—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You do need to conclude, minister.

Kevin Stewart: In which case, Presiding Officer, I move amendment S6M-08954.3, to leave out from “notes the recent” to end and insert:

“supports the vision outlined in the policy prospectus, Equality, Opportunity, Community, for a public transport system that is more accessible, available and affordable; notes the success of the concessionary bus travel schemes, which now offer free bus travel to 2.6 million people, with over two thirds of young people under 22 now holding the National Entitlement Card, making over 62 million journeys to date; agrees that bus services should serve the needs of local communities; notes the introduction of provisions under the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019, which will empower local authorities with the flexible tools that they need to respond to their own transport challenges, coupled with funding that allows local authorities to develop new ways of supporting bus

development; recognises the key role of bus services in decarbonising transport and therefore welcomes the recent second tranche of zero emissions bus funding, and commends all of the staff involved in sustaining bus services over the last three years.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I ask members who intend to speak in the debate who have not already done so to press their request-to-speak button.

15:04

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): I thank the Labour Party for securing the debate. I am a fan of buses, and I have been ever since my dad worked for a bus company in the 1970s. I would be even more of a fan if I had a decent bus service where I live that I could use. However, like many people, I do not. Out of necessity, I tend to take the car, walk or cycle to most places. I do not want it to be that way. Too many people live in public transport deserts or places such as Shotts where the bus service is patchy and, on a Sunday, virtually non-existent.

Mark Ruskell: Will the member give way?

Graham Simpson: No.

Before the pandemic, 373 million journeys a year were made by bus in Scotland, which was the largest number of journeys for any form of public transport. Journey figures have rebounded, but not to pre-pandemic levels. Buses can hold the key if the Government is serious about hitting its target to reduce the number of car miles by 20 per cent by 2030. However, it has presented no ideas on how to achieve that.

Buses need to be there for people, and they need to offer something better than the car. The Scottish Government's decision to cut the network support grant plus in March was baffling. That did not happen anywhere else in Britain. Operator warnings that that could lead to a rise in fares and a reduction in services fell on deaf ears. Last year's savage cuts to local government spending were met with similar disdain, with Councillor Gail Macgregor of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities warning in January that councils would struggle to fund services.

However, it is not just on funding that the SNP is failing. The Government's goal to remove the majority of the country's diesel bus fleet in favour of zero-emission models by the end of 2023 lies in tatters. Transform Scotland estimates that just 16 per cent will be converted by that time.

Kevin Stewart: We are now at a stage at which 15 per cent of our bus fleet is using decarbonised buses, which is much higher than south of the border, where Mr Simpson's party is in power. Within the next three years, it is my understanding that it is hoped that the fleet will reach a further 12

per cent. We are going further and faster than the Tories south of the border.

Graham Simpson: The minister mentioned a figure of 15 per cent, yet Transform Scotland said that it was 16 per cent—that is nowhere near the target.

The £500 million bus partnership fund, which launched in 2019 to deliver bus priority measures on our roads, has paid out just £25 million since that time. It is little wonder that the Parliament's Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee recommended that the Government reviews the scheme to see why there has been such poor take-up. Of course, fares can play a big part in getting people on to public transport. We await the introduction of a cross-modal travel card of the type that was given to delegates at the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26. We can only look south with envy at the £2 fare cap, which has just been extended until October, when it will go up for a year to £2.50. With a bit of promotion, that will be a massive success.

Our failing bus network is having a detrimental impact on people's everyday lives. The Scottish Government cannot wait about any longer. If we want to get people on to buses, we need comprehensive routes that are easy to use, and fares need to be simple and cheap. I have heard nothing of that from the minister.

I move amendment S6M-08954.2, to insert at end:

“further calls on the Scottish Government to set out in detail how it plans to achieve its 20% car kilometre reduction target by 2030, and calls on the Scottish Government to publish its Fair Fares Review before summer recess 2023.”

15:08

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): Had my amendment been chosen, it would have called on the Scottish Government to extend the under-22s free bus entitlement to ferries, which in many island communities are used in the same way as bus services. That would help with the aim of the policy to encourage more people to use public transport, which would create a habit for the future.

In order to reach our ambitious net zero targets, buses will need to play a significant role. Scrapping our diesel fleets is a priority. Having more people on buses will help us to lower emissions, reduce traffic and lower the need for road building.

One double-decker bus can take seventy-five cars off our roads, but bus services are failing communities across Scotland. Transport Scotland's household survey on transport and

travel in Scotland in 2021—which was, admittedly, a difficult year for public transport figures—found that although 42 per cent of adults who responded used a bus at least once a month in large urban areas, only 12 per cent did so in remote rural areas. The same survey showed that those in our remote rural, accessible rural and small remote towns were among the most likely to have access to a car.

The Age Scotland briefing highlights that two thirds of over-60s in remote and rural areas either do not have a bus pass or do not use it, while almost 60 percent of single-pensioner households do not have access to a car. Buses need to be as convenient as cars if we are to be successful in increasing their usage. However, cars in rural and island locations are often a necessity because of geography and sparse populations.

Scottish Liberal Democrats have been calling for a model similar to that of Transport for London, to reregulate buses using local transport boards, which would choose the routes and timings. Bus companies can bid for those, allowing communities to decide where buses can go.

Changes by a previous transport minister, which gave powers back to local authorities to run their own bus services were a move in the right direction, but a lack of funding for local authorities inhibits that option's full potential.

True reform needs appropriate funding to make it happen. When it is time to review services, so much can have changed in the interim years of a contract that once-popular routes might have declined, while the need for a new route might not have been detected because potential users have found other means to travel. Confidence in the service subsequently goes down and the spiral continues.

As the motion states, bus ticket price rises in the middle of a cost of living crisis have hit commuters hard, and route cancellations make it difficult for many shift workers, who find themselves hard pressed to find bus services that tie in with their work patterns. We need to look at how we can improve the provision of services outside of rush hours without running empty services.

With a general move to more people working from home, commuter services are not the only infrastructure for us to consider. In rural and island areas, superfast broadband roll-out is still not complete, despite the SNP commitment to do that by 2021, while mobile connectivity remains patchy. Digital exclusion prevents people from accessing everyday services, including travel apps, or from finding bus information.

Finally, national infrastructure, such as tunnels for island communities, would help to reduce some

of the greatest contributors to carbon emissions in the isles—ferry journeys.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. I remind members that we are tight for time. The words “In conclusion” should be uttered before the four-minute mark, not on the four-minute mark. With that, I call Monica Lennon. You have up to four minutes, Ms Lennon.

15:12

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): I am pleased to speak in support of the Scottish Labour motion. I thank my colleague Alex Rowley for bringing his passion to the chamber today.

Public transport and buses are subjects close to all our hearts, but Alex Rowley is absolutely right—this debate is first and foremost about people. It is about the future of our communities and young people, and the very future of our planet.

Buses are essential lifelines for our communities. They enable younger and older people the freedom to travel around their communities and beyond. They should be an affordable and reliable alternative to cars, and they should be run in the interests of people and not private shareholders.

Buses are also an essential part of Scotland's journey to net zero. The Scottish Government has rightly recognised the importance of buses in its national transport strategy and the programme for Government, where it pledged to support Scotland's bus networks. Unfortunately, despite the importance of buses to net zero and those pledges from ministers, many of our communities face bus deserts, a point made by Graham Simpson—areas where few or no reliable regular bus services are available.

Scottish Labour supports the expansion of the national travel concessionary scheme that we introduced when in government, but the point has been made that what use is the free bus pass if no bus turns up at the bus stop? People are frustrated. The minister wants us all to be very calm today, but the reality is that we cannot solve a problem if we do not admit it in the first place. Therefore, I think it unfortunate that the Government wants to delete the fair and factual points that Labour makes in its motion.

Where bus services continue to exist, many people simply cannot afford to use them. We know that the people who rely on buses are predominantly those on lower incomes who cannot afford to buy a car. Around one third of people are without access to a car.

Beatrice Wishart mentioned some of the challenges that our remote and rural areas face.

Colleagues have heard me talk about the withdrawal of the X1 express bus service from Hamilton to Glasgow many times before. Back in July 2020, First Bus withdrew that lifeline service for people in Hamilton, which had enabled residents to get into the town centre and beyond it to the city centre. People relied on that route for work, as well as to access education, social and leisure opportunities and healthcare, including attending hospital appointments in Glasgow.

Since that time, we have come out of lockdown and people want to get out again. People have told me that a return journey from one end of Hamilton to the other just to see a doctor costs them £15. That is completely unaffordable.

I have raised the issue many times. The minister is new to his post, and I hope that we will meet soon, along with local people from Hamilton, to find solutions.

Sticking with the X1 bus, I think that I have told the minister this before, but I will say again that more than 100 people turned up at a bus stop recently to get a photo taken, to send a message that they want their bus back. That is how serious a matter this is. However, people not getting any answers.

The cancellation of the X1 bus and the campaign that the community is leading highlight how much people care about the services. Monday is the start of #lovemybus week. The people of Hamilton loved their X1 bus; communities around Scotland love their buses, too. It is time that the Scottish Government shows that it also loves buses and that it will provide not just the vision but the investment that we need for our people and the planet.

15:17

Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP): Buses connect us to our communities and to each other, and they give us freedom and choice. A good bus network should give us an environmentally friendly, accessible and cheaper alternative to cars.

My constituency in West Lothian is a semi-rural area, with many towns and villages with a higher-than-average reliance on cars. Bus services in West Lothian are woefully unreliable currently and have been for some time. Changes to commercial bus operators' services have meant that many services no longer run, with some villages effectively cut off at certain times and on a Sunday.

Of course, commercial operators' decisions to cancel or withdraw services are not the original source of current bus service provision issues. When I have raised concerns with our two current

major bus operators—McGill's and Lothian Buses—they cite driver shortages as one of the major reasons for declining service provision.

We know that driver shortages are a direct result of the impact of Brexit, which the people of Scotland did not vote for, and that the UK Government's current immigration system further limits potential recruitment of European Union drivers. I suspect that I do not need to reiterate to members the extreme and continuing adverse economic impact of Brexit on Scotland's economy. At the very least, the UK Government must agree to put bus drivers on the shortage occupation list.

The Scottish Government, using its devolved powers, has provided local authorities with the powers to introduce improvements to bus services in their local areas via section 34 of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019. More than £500 million, via the bus partnership fund, will be distributed through 14 bus partnerships across Scotland, one of which is West Lothian bus alliance in my constituency. Initial funding of £25.8 million was allocated to the partnerships so that they could undertake appraisal work.

A pressing issue remains: we have yet to find out what action the local authority will take with those new powers. West Lothian Council is already working on a long-term review of public transport options for subsidised support, which it can then apply to the £500 million bus partnership fund to support. However, in the meantime, buses are being cancelled.

My constituents cannot get to their work or to hospital. We need bus services support in the interim before people lose their jobs or just revert back to car usage. Under pressure from the public and the SNP opposition, the Labour-led, Tory-supported West Lothian Council finally agreed to emergency support for one of the cancelled routes recently.

West Lothian may be semi-rural, but it is a major route for commuting by car along the M8 and M9 corridors to both Glasgow and Edinburgh. As far more people live in West Lothian than in the city of Dundee, if Scotland is to reach net zero, we need viable alternatives to car use.

Park-and-bus-ride opportunities on the M8 near the Heartlands junction and at the new Winchburgh junction on the M9 are needed, but transport co-ordination is required for that, and I am told that to date that has been singularly absent, with little movement towards it occurring. Having reliable, circular bus links to the two railway lines that go through West Lothian would also be a sensible and realisable goal in support of achieving sustainable travel.

We need to encourage people back on to buses and out of their cars post Covid, but people cannot

use public transport if their area is not served. Despite the takeover of the previously poor First Bus service by McGill's, and the determination of McGill's to drive up standards of reliability and confidence, the current state of limbo while it gets there is not helping anyone.

The lack of reliable bus services is having a huge impact on my constituents. People are worried about losing their jobs. They are missing health appointments, losing access to basic amenities and endlessly waiting for buses that simply do not turn up. Buses can bring freedom, choice and connection—we cannot afford to miss the bus on this one.

15:21

Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con):

I will focus my comments on local bus services—the sort of services that act as lifelines for our communities by providing the most vulnerable people with everyday access to shopping, services and socialising.

Despite the importance of such bus routes, they can be economically challenging to operate. That is when local authorities step in by providing subsidies to ensure that the routes are accessible to people who have few, if any, other transport options. Therefore, it is of great concern that we see local authorities losing their ability to offer that support. With their budgets having been hollowed out by years of cuts from the Scottish Government, local authorities are inevitably making cuts of their own in order to balance their books. Sadly, local bus services are among those cuts.

I have seen that in my community, where the SNP-led Dundee City Council has voted to end support for five local bus routes. In an effort to plug an £18 million hole in the council budget, more than £122,000 worth of support is being cut from the 51, 202, 204, 206 and 236 services. Those bus routes connect communities across the city—the Ferry, the west end, Lochee, Kirkton, Lawside and more besides. Their loss will be felt in each of those communities, and will be felt especially by the many elderly passengers who rely on them. As my constituents would expect of me, I have taken the matter up with the leader of the council. Along with local councillor Derek Scott, I will continue to push for those services to be reinstated.

This is not just a problem for Dundee, though. The environment and economy spokesperson for the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, Councillor Gail Macgregor, wrote to the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee warning of the risk. She said:

“there is concern that incredibly stretched levels of funding in FY23/24 will prevent Councils from providing the bus services they are currently providing, either directly or by subsidising”.

Given that, according to one survey, more than one in five Scots uses a bus weekly, the loss of any service is a serious matter—yet that is what will continue to happen if the Scottish Government keeps gutting council budgets. Its doing so also completely undermines the decision to give councils the ability to run their own bus services. What good is giving councils that power if they have no money to enable them to use it? That is another example of the SNP-Green Government talking a good game but failing to deliver results.

The target to convert the majority of Scotland’s bus fleet to zero-emission vehicles by 2023 is another promise that looks set for failure, with a Transform Scotland report estimating that just 16 per cent of the fleet will have been converted by the deadline.

We have a Scottish Government that is off target, is not investing in our communities and has seen passenger numbers decline by 40 per cent over the past few years. That all adds up to a Government that does not know how to deliver high-quality public transport. I invite the Government to listen to my constituents. They do not want gimmicks from this Government; they want their local bus services back.

15:25

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): Monica Lennon mentioned that next week is #lovemybus week. I have to say that the event will seem to be rather ironic for many of my constituents, who will be feeling unrequited love after their local buses have been removed. Many of my constituents love taking the bus, but private bus companies do not appear to love them back.

Thousands of my constituents in Renfrewshire are angry, frustrated and in despair after McGill’s cut a huge 13 per cent of services at the start of this month. The company claims that the primary reason for that is the Government’s withdrawal of Covid recovery support funding. Those are the latest cuts in the bus market, which has been decimated over the past 16 years. For example, in 2007, under the then Labour Government, there were 5,400 buses in operation, but the figure had plummeted to 3,700 in 2022. As Alex Rowley rightly said, young people and older people alike are now asking what the point is of having a free bus pass if there is no bus to get on.

In Renfrewshire, we are seeing the dilution of some services and the withdrawal of other services altogether. In Kilbarchan, buses have been cut from one every 20 minutes to one an

hour. In Erskine, young people are without the 22 service to get them to college in Paisley. In Gallowhill and Whitehaugh, disabled residents have lost the service from inside their scheme. In Neilston and Barrhead, cuts are affecting national health service workers who are trying to make it to shifts at the Royal Alexandra hospital. In Foxbar, a constituent of mine who is a dialysis patient is having to take a daily taxi journey because of early morning bus cuts.

Working mothers in Johnstone also face early morning bus cuts, and now find it impossible to get to work on time after dropping the kids at school. Service cuts are affecting Spateston, Linwood, Ferguslie, Hawkhead, Kirklandneuk, Bishopton and more. The list goes on and on.

Frankly, people have had enough. The bus cuts are unacceptable to them, so they should be unacceptable to the Scottish Government, too. People do not want warm words; they want action. They want us to reverse the cuts and urgently deliver a plan to improve our bus services.

Strathclyde Partnership for Transport, which has few resources, has stepped in to support some services. That is welcome, but temporary and very limited stopgap measures simply will not cut it. Therefore, it is frankly astonishing that the Scottish Government has done nothing—precisely nothing—to stop bus services in Renfrewshire being cut.

It is also extremely disappointing that the new Minister for Transport denies the problem in his amendment and has so far ignored my invitation to visit Renfrewshire to hear directly from passengers who have been affected. People in my area are rightly asking, “What is this Government here for?” For all the talk from the minister today, not a single bus service that was cut at the start of this month in Renfrewshire has been, or is set to be, reinstated.

The Scottish Government is not a bystander in this, so it should stop acting like one and govern, because the situation is not inevitable. We can and should do things differently, and there are solutions that should be implemented. First, it is long past time that instead of happily handing over to private bus companies hundreds of millions of pounds of taxpayers’ money in subsidies every year, it should impose stricter conditions on support.

Kevin Stewart: Will the member give way?

Neil Bibby: I do not have time, I am afraid.

Secondly, as Alex Rowley rightly said, we need a cap on bus fares. Labour mayors across England have capped single fares at £2.00; meanwhile, my constituents pay among the highest bus fares anywhere in the United

Kingdom, at £2.85 for a 2-mile journey. Finally, we need to ensure that there is fundamental reform of the broken bus market. Local buses should be under local control.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Bibby. We have to move on.

Neil Bibby: The Scottish Government should ensure that local transport authorities are able to bring buses under public control.

15:29

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): Improved bus connectivity is critical to linking communities, to travelling cheaply and safely and to our commitments to tackling emissions. Bus connectivity can ensure that families and friends of all ages who live in different areas across Scotland have a reliable way of keeping in contact with one another, which is something that we all missed so dearly during the pandemic.

The Scottish Government's plan for a 20 per cent reduction in car kilometres by 2030 is dependent on improving and increasing the reliability of public transport options including buses and trains, and the national transport strategy has specifically cited improved bus routes as a way to reach net zero.

I am pleased to hear that the Scottish Government is committed to making sustainable travel modes more attractive. That commitment is demonstrated through the 2023-24 budget, in which the Government allocated a record £425.7 million to support bus services and concessionary travel across Scotland.

Given that I represent a constituency in the central belt, people might think that there is a wealth of bus routes across my constituency, but that is not necessarily the case. Similar to the situation in Hamilton, Coatbridge in my constituency lost, in 2019, the only bus route that connected the town with the city of Glasgow. The loss of the route left many people in my constituency feeling isolated, disconnected and separated from the surrounding urban areas. My colleague Neil Gray—who represents the neighbouring Airdrie and Shotts constituency—and I campaigned heavily with the community for the return of a bus connection to our largest city. I am happy to say that, in March this year came the announcement of the Citylink 902 service, which, as well as finally connecting Coatbridge to Glasgow again, takes people to Edinburgh airport for the first time. It was great to meet the operations director to hear more about that excellent service, which I encourage my constituents to continue to use.

I have also been working collaboratively with First Bus, which I have found to be open to new ideas. I am hopeful that another service will be trialled this summer to connect specific areas of Coatbridge to Glasgow city centre.

There is no doubt: the services that I have mentioned, following the work that I and others have done with communities to make them possible, would not have made it off the ground had the free bus pass for young people not been introduced.

Graham Simpson: Will the member take an intervention?

Fulton MacGregor: I do not have enough time. I am sorry.

Although the developments are welcome, areas along the northern corridor in my constituency still feel disconnected, so I am engaging with bus companies to try to find a solution to the more complex issue of connecting the small villages that make up the northern corridor.

As other members have said, Scotland's concessionary travel schemes have been trailblazing in encouraging both young and old to travel by bus. However, until very recently residents in my constituency would have found very little use for them, so I hope that that will change across my whole constituency.

Relevant stakeholders have told me that a backlog of staffing issues, including hiring and training of new drivers, has resulted in numerous delays and route cancellations. Fiona Hyslop made a good point about Brexit. Now that the backlog is drawing to a close, it is critical that routes that had been cancelled be revived and that new routes be established, where necessary.

As I said, residents across the northern corridor in my constituency feel that current bus services are inadequate. The community there is ever growing, so I take this opportunity to urge bus companies to examine the viability of increasing services in the area. I would be very grateful if the minister could give consideration to that area of the country, and would be happy to speak to him about the issues.

I am confident that the Scottish Government recognises the importance of increased bus connectivity and access to bus services. In my constituency, I have seen the sense of isolation that comes when a route is discontinued, but I have also seen the benefits and delight when a defunct route is reintroduced. Although increased funding and new route announcements are welcome news, we must keep up the momentum and continue to invest in our public transport services for the good of our communities, our economy and our environment.

15:33

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Bus services are essential public services that must be run in the public interest. However, the reality is that we have been stuck in a cycle of decline in bus services, which started with Tory deregulation in the 1980s. It is now time to break that cycle, which means reflecting not only on how bad things have got but on the solutions. It is the solutions that are represented in the Government's amendment.

It is absolutely clear that, following the widening of concessionary travel to under-22s, a new generation of young people are choosing to take the bus. More than two thirds of young people under 22 now hold a national entitlement card, with more than 62 million journeys having been made to date. The card is improving access to education, work and social opportunities, and is saving money for hundreds of thousands of young people and their families during the cost of living crisis. Holding the card has built the confidence and independence of teenagers. It has helped to address transport poverty across Scotland, it has enabled young people who are in desperate need to access food banks and it has helped many young people to access a job for the first time.

The evaluation of the scheme and the fair fares review should point to where we could go next with concessionary travel. I see a pressing need to extend the scheme to people in the asylum system who are, thanks to Tory cruelty, forced to live on £45 a week. I also see the case for an extension to young folk on islands who use ferries as they would buses.

I agree with Monica Lennon that one can get on a bus only if the service actually exists and is reliable. Too often, private operators are removing or scaling back services despite the huge amounts of funding from concessionary fares and subsidies from the Scottish Government, so I was pleased that the previous transport minister announced a

"full review of all funding streams from the Scottish Government to bus operators in Scotland".

I believe that that review will bring the kind of conditionality for which Neil Bibby was calling.

Monica Lennon: Will the member give way?

Mark Ruskell: I am sorry. I do not have time.

It is time to hold private bus companies to account on fares and service cancellations, and for the Government to work more with the traffic commissioner on enforcement. Use of the bus open data system, for example, would help both passengers and the commissioner to sanction the poor delivery that we see from many companies.

The Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 delivered new bus powers for councils. It gave them the

ability to serve the needs of local communities by setting up municipally owned bus operators. Those powers have the potential to revolutionise services, so it is disappointing that Alex Rowley said absolutely nothing in his initial comments about municipal ownership of bus companies. He might need to take a leaf out of Andy Burnham's book; he has focused on the solution, which is public control of a public service.

That is what we need from Labour—solutions. We need Labour to come to the chamber and agree on areas such as municipalisation, and to work with the new minister and councils to deliver it. Let us focus on the solutions and not just on how bad things have gotten—[*Interruption.*] I want to get on to the solutions, Mr Rowley.

The community bus fund will provide critical start-up funding for interested local authorities to explore the new powers around franchising and municipalisation. We should remember, too, that local authorities have powers on road-user charging and workplace parking levies which could help to build the required funds to sustain municipalised or franchised bus services. Let us get investment into publicly owned and publicly controlled bus companies. I hope that councils are showing the political leadership to use those powers.

We have barely scratched the surface this afternoon on the reforms that are needed to improve our bus services, but I look forward to more constructive opportunities to debate and develop the vision and find the solutions that we need.

15:38

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): The bus industry is changing. The past few years have seen major changes in areas from passenger numbers to journey types and frequency of services. However, nowhere is the change greater than in the buses themselves.

Electric buses are now being introduced—even if that is at a pace that suggests that the Scottish Government's target to remove the majority of diesel buses by the end of the year will be another example of its being big on talk and short on action. I listened to the minister's reply to an intervention by my colleague. It seems that he is content to mask the failure of not achieving the target by pointing elsewhere. I suggest to the minister that he should not set targets that he has no hope of reaching.

I recently met representatives of Stagecoach West Scotland and saw some of the newest electric buses that have been used to run the first fully electric semi-rural service in Scotland through the Irvine valley. Although those electric buses are

a significant step forward, they still have their limitations. Despite considerable advances in battery technology, which are increasing range and optimising lifespan, charging throughout the day remains vital. That requires investment in chargers at bus stations and depots and potentially elsewhere on the route to keep the battery topped up.

All of that infrastructure, together with the buses, comes at a substantial cost. An electric bus can be at least twice as expensive as its diesel equivalent and, although the costs can be offset over the lifetime of the vehicle, the up-front cost is substantial. Similarly, the charging infrastructure comes with a large up-front cost, particularly if it needs to be installed in more rural areas or areas that need wider grid upgrades to accommodate it.

Members will by now be familiar with my view that hydrogen could be the missing piece in the puzzle to achieve net zero. Hydrogen fuel cell vehicles might be the key to unlocking longer-range zero-emission buses. Although some early trials with that technology have had mixed results, I urge the Scottish Government to continue to support research into that emerging technology.

Of course, the biggest challenge for bus providers remains how to meet the costs of running those services. The significant losses during the Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated existing financial pressures to a degree that could never have been predicted. In the chamber, we routinely call for bus companies to continue to run services on routes that could never credibly be profitable. Those services, which are often lifelines for smaller rural communities, should be protected, even if there is a cost to Government.

I grant that there are many demands on the Government's finances—ferry overspends, ministers for independence, cleaning up whatever mess the Scottish Greens have made of a policy this week—but there is a strong argument that improved targeted financial support for bus services would have significant benefits, particularly in rural areas, such as my South Scotland region.

Monica Lennon: Will the member give way?

Brian Whittle: I would love to, but I do not have time.

It is important to stress just how important a role Scotland's bus networks have to play in reaching our net zero targets.

One of the first things that any of us learned as a child is that the wheels on the bus go round and round all day long. If that is to remain the case, we must ensure that bus providers are given the right long-term financial support to give them the confidence to invest in new technologies, keep

fares low and protect lifeline routes that offer the only real public transport option for so many people in rural areas.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you for that trip down memory lane, Mr Whittle.

I call Keith Brown, who is the final speaker in the open debate. After he has spoken, we will move to the closing speeches. All those who have participated in the debate will need to be in the chamber.

15:42

Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP): I am pleased to be able to participate in this debate, although it has been quite a dispiriting one—I refer especially to Labour members. After 16 years of failure in the Parliament, we would think that there would be some analysis, some understanding of the problem, and some possible solutions. However, we heard nothing about those from Alex Rowley. All we heard was the usual soundbites and attack lines.

Everyone who is involved in bus travel and who has had a constituent come to them about an issue knows that two of the main issues are climate change and social exclusion. However, the causes of some of the problems that we have talked about have been the pandemic, Brexit and, in particular, the recruitment of drivers, which Fiona Hyslop made a point about. For example, every time that Lothian Buses goes on a recruitment spree, every other part of the country loses out in terms of the pool of drivers. Of course, many people—not least people from eastern Europe—who were previously happy to be drivers have been prevented from being a driver because of Brexit.

Monica Lennon: Will the member take an intervention?

Keith Brown: No. I have only four minutes.

There was not a word about Brexit or the pandemic. Everybody knows that the pandemic has altered people's work patterns and commuting practices. During lockdown, many drivers sought other jobs and did not return. As I said, Brexit cut off access to another source of drivers. I have seen the shortage of drivers in my constituency leading to reductions in services on a couple of routes—

Alex Rowley: Will the member take an intervention?

Keith Brown: I have said that I am not taking any interventions. I have only four minutes.

Is that a uniquely Scottish problem? Of course it is not, any more than it is a uniquely Clackmannanshire and Dunblane problem.

Neil Bibby invited us to look at the record of the Labour Party elsewhere in the UK. Let us do that. Let us look, for example, at Wales, where the Labour Party is actually in power—

Neil Bibby: I said look at our record here—in Scotland.

Keith Brown: I know that this is very uncomfortable—it will not last very long.

The number of passenger journeys per person has been decreasing across Great Britain since 2008-09. In Wales, the number of journeys per person is less than half the rate in both Scotland and England. Although the total distance travelled on buses in Wales increased by almost a third compared with the previous year, the total distance travelled decreased most in Wales compared with pre-pandemic levels, and that has recovered the least compared with England and Scotland.

I do not quote those figures to try to make the Welsh Government look bad, but merely to point out that the Labour Party patently does not have a magic wand to fix bus services in Wales, and it does not have one—and it has not suggested one—for Scotland either.

Of course it is the job of Opposition parties to oppose and to highlight where the Government might be going wrong, but they also have a duty to be honest with the public and to make suggestions if they think that things should be done differently.

Let us look at the motion. We are told that the improvement of bus services should happen more quickly and that local authorities should have more resources—although I do not know how the Tories are going to manage that by cutting £500 million from the Scottish budget through tax cuts. There is simply no indication from either side of where the money will come from. When we are dealing with a virtually fixed-size budget, that is simply irresponsible.

Surely the motion was lodged because the Labour Party wanted to do more than simply gripe. There must be a big idea—a cunning plan to transform bus transport in Scotland. It is to cap fares. That is the solution put forward by the Labour Party. There is no reference to, or understanding of, the impact of Brexit or the pandemic. What a paucity of vision that represents.

One idea on its own is highly unlikely to lead to the increased passenger numbers that help to make bus routes more sustainable. We need a broad package of measures, and that is what the Scottish Government is addressing.

Just this month, the Minister for Transport launched a £300,000 campaign co-funded by the Scottish Government and the Confederation of Passenger Transport to encourage people to choose the bus. Meanwhile, the various concessionary bus travel schemes brought in by the Scottish Government have now reached the significant stage at which 100 million bus journeys are being taken each year by holders of one or other of the concessionary travel scheme cards.

I am absolutely delighted that the people of Clackmannanshire and Dunblane and people throughout Scotland are taking advantage of the concessionary travel cards available. Those figures underline the SNP's commitment to widening access to free bus travel.

For that reason, I support the amendment in Kevin Stewart's name.

15:46

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): Aspects of this debate have been really good to hear. It is clear that there is cross-party consensus on the benefits of buses. Alex Rowley has described them as “a key lifeline service”. Maurice Golden developed that and described them as

“lifelines for our communities by providing the most vulnerable people with everyday access to shopping, services and socialising.”

Brian Whittle stressed

“just how important a role Scotland's bus networks have to play in reaching our net zero targets.”

It was important to hear about the challenges faced by our bus operators—for example, the cuts to local authorities that left COSLA warning that incredibly stretched levels of funding will prevent councils from providing the bus services that they currently provide. Maurice Golden told us that that is happening in Dundee right now and, just today, *The Press and Journal* has reported that Stagecoach has slashed bus services across Aberdeen and the shire following council cuts.

We heard from Brian Whittle about the lack of investment in renewables charging infrastructure, and we heard about the Scottish Government's decision to cut the network support grant in March, which has led to operators warning of rises in fares and a reduction in services.

That lack of support is stark. The Confederation of Passenger Transport tells us that, although the bus sector accounts for 75 per cent of all public transport trips, FirstBus pointed out that each bus journey is supported by 27p from the Scottish Government. By contrast, trains get £3.27 per trip. That cross-modal piece is important. That is why the failures to introduce a cross-modal travel card

and to conduct a fair fares review are so concerning.

What has been so thoroughly depressing is a point that was well made by Alex Rowley at the head of the debate. We heard from Graham Simpson that the Government's goal is to remove the majority of the country's diesel bus fleet in favour of zero emission models by the end of 2023, but that it has achieved a mere 16 per cent; we heard from Brian Whittle that the target to reduce car kilometres by 20 per cent by 2030 lacks detail and credibility; and we heard that the Scottish Government's £500 million bus partnership fund to deliver bus priority measures has paid out just 5 per cent since 2019. Nevertheless, the Scottish Government comes to the chamber with an amendment that utterly fails to acknowledge the issues. Instead, it tries to present a picture in which all in the garden is rosy.

On the rare occasions when issues were acknowledged by speakers such as Fiona Hyslop and Keith Brown, they blamed the operators, the councils and the pandemic, and tried to distract from their failings in the chamber by talking about Wales. That is what I find the most galling. As Monica Lennon put it, we cannot solve a problem if we do not admit to it in the first place. If the Government will not acknowledge the problems and challenges, it cannot meaningfully implement the solutions.

We have all been sent those solutions—we have been sent really exciting data-driven, evidence-based, detailed solutions by Transform Scotland, the Confederation of Passenger Transport, FirstBus, the Poverty Alliance, Friends of the Earth Scotland and more. In contrast, as Alex Rowley said, we have heard no vision—no clue—from the Scottish Government, and it will continue to fail the people of Scotland.

All those organisations are watching to see whether the Government will acknowledge the problems, listen to the Opposition parties and learn from those submissions, or whether SNP and Green MSPs vote at decision time for a weak amendment and more decline under a failing Government. We shall see.

15:50

Kevin Stewart: I welcome the opportunity to highlight the importance of bus services in Scotland. I wish that the debate had been a little more consensual, as Alex Rowley claimed that he wanted it to be, but that has not been the case. It is interesting that there is always a real kickback from the Opposition parties when it is pointed out to them the differences that exist between the situation here and that in other parts of the UK,

where Labour or the Tories are in power. Not everything in the garden is rosy there, either.

A number of members were quite realistic in their speeches. Ms Hyslop and Mr Brown pointed out the difficulties that Brexit is causing. If Opposition members were to speak to the bus operators, they would find that, in many parts of the country, the operators face a significant difficulty with driver shortages, which is having an impact on services.

Liam Kerr: Will the minister give way?

Kevin Stewart: No. I want to continue.

Let us look at some of the support that we are providing. I have already highlighted how much financial support we are providing to ensure that our bus services are the best that they can be. In 2023-24, more than £420 million is being allocated to that.

Another interesting aspect of the debate has been the fact that while Labour members have called for more subsidy, Alex Rowley has said that he does not want money to go into the pockets of shareholders. I agree with him on that, so what do Labour members actually want?

I think that our concessionary fare schemes provide the best possible way of ensuring that we get patronage on our buses. The extension of the young persons scheme to under-22s has led to the provision of more bus services in certain areas. Earlier this year, West Coast Motors doubled the frequency on one of its main routes because of the increase in patronage among under-22s. That is a good thing. More than 62 million free bus journeys have been made because of the scheme for under-22s, as Mr Ruskell pointed out. That shows that there is an appetite for sustainable travel in Scotland. We are aiming to build lifetime habits.

Alex Rowley: I use the buses, and I was quite shocked by the massive increase in bus fares that was implemented a few weeks ago. Does the minister accept that a 15 per cent increase in bus fares is a barrier to poorer people being able to access public transport?

Kevin Stewart: Yes, I do. That is why we are undertaking the fair fares review. We want to get this right. It is not good that folk face those increases, and we are doing something about it by holding that review. I hope that Mr Rowley will support it and encourage folk to get involved in it.

The Scottish Government has supported the decarbonisation of approximately 15 per cent of the Scottish public service bus fleet—*[Interruption.]* This week, we provided an additional £58 million of funding for the ScotZEB fund—the Scottish zero emission bus challenge

fund—thereby increasing the environmental benefits of bus travel.

I heard the Tories say, “That’s terrible.” The position here is a hell of a lot better than the position south of the border, that is for sure.

We have ensured that local transport authorities now have the power to run their own bus services, and further secondary legislation to allow bus franchising and partnership working will be introduced later this year. I hope that local authorities will be ambitious, have vision and set up those municipal services across the board.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to conclude, I am afraid.

Kevin Stewart: We may have different views; I am willing to listen to those views as we move forward consensually.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Sarah Boyack to wind up the debate.

15:55

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): It would have been a more constructive debate if the minister had not started by deleting most of our motion. We have agreement right across the chamber on the importance of bus services to our constituents. In the early days of the Parliament, I introduced free bus passes for the over-60s. Through a Labour amendment to the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019, we made sure that we got support for municipal ownership of bus services, because we know the benefits of Lothian Buses and we know, from the situation in Manchester and London, the benefits of using municipal ownership to deliver services.

We welcomed the introduction of free bus passes for under-22s. Our choice would have been under-26s, but that measure gives young people the opportunity to use buses as a matter of course. However, as Monica Lennon said, that only works if those young people have bus services to use. As Neil Bibby said, we need conditionality. We need to get the maximum benefit from the huge amount of money that is going into bus services and we need to get the right response from the private companies that are taking that money.

In the past few years, the loss of bus services means that there are now 25 per cent fewer than there were a decade ago. Across parties, we have had excellent briefings from lots of organisations, which have highlighted the need for us to act now. Buses are vital to give people low-carbon choices.

Graham Simpson: Will the member give way?

Sarah Boyack: If it is very brief.

Graham Simpson: Does Sarah Boyack think that #lovemybus week should be renamed #where’smybus week?

Sarah Boyack: Having met the organisers this morning, I know that we need actual buses. It is a case of, “Where’s my bus?”

That takes me on to digital connectivity. On the points that Beatrice Wishart made, we can see that there are massive areas of Scotland where there are no buses at all. There is also a digital disconnect, which is a particular issue for older people and people on lower incomes. Those people need to know about the availability of the buses that there are, and they need to know when those buses will arrive. We need to make sure that that information is accessible for older people. We need more, not less, real-time information at bus stops.

We need to make sure that people are able to use buses. A key issue in the research that we were sent was reliability: 83 per cent of those surveyed said that it was their top issue. People do not want to be stuck at a bus stop if they are elderly, with kids or trying to get to work on time. We are not only losing bus services; we are seeing fares rising, and this is at a point when we are seeing major amounts of money being spent.

We need to get value for money, and that means that we need political leadership from the SNP-Green Government. We are not seeing that. We need more promotion of the available bus services. We need investment to enable communities to be served, so that we make that shift to low-carbon buses. That is not just about having low-carbon services, but about having any services. It is about empowering and funding our local authorities to invest in bus priority schemes, to enable buses to be more reliable, and to make them more attractive to people who currently have to rely on cars.

As people move to electric vehicles, huge numbers of our constituents will not be able to afford such cars, and that will make buses more important than ever. We need to reverse the cuts that are taking place and add more services for the future. That will require municipal buses.

Today’s report by the Accounts Commission highlights that councils are at “breaking point”. The comments made by COSLA show that it knows that councils do not have the money to make the radical change needed.

We need a fares cap now, so that people can continue to use buses. We need conditionality for the money that the Scottish Government currently spends on buses through our over-60 and under-22 schemes. We need to see investing in and supporting bus services as a key action if we want

to tackle social inequalities, shift people out of cars and tackle the climate emergency.

In addition, we need to address constituents' current fears that there are more bus cuts to come. That is happening right across the country: in Renfrewshire, West Lothian and Pathhead in Midlothian, and even in Edinburgh, with Lothian Buses. Constituents in Edinburgh are writing to us because we have lost buses such as the 42, and we are losing the 41 and 49. We need action now, and we need a political commitment.

I go back to the minister's first words. Can we have consensus? Yes. The cross-party group on sustainable transport has a mission, and it is telling the Scottish Government what to do now. Our motion sets out what we need now. If we accept the Conservative amendment, we could get action before the summer holidays. Although #lovemybus week is next week, "Where's my bus?" is a problem for now. We need action from the SNP-Green Government now—not warm words and nice pledges, but action. Next week, the Government should announce what it is going to do to spend the money to get better results for our constituents—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Boyack. You need to conclude.

Sarah Boyack: —because, trust me, the Government will not tackle the climate emergency without it.

Mental Health Crisis

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-08955, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on tackling Scotland's mental health crisis. I invite members who wish to participate in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons now or as soon as possible.

I advise colleagues that the debate is as tightly constrained, timewise, as the previous debate, so I encourage all members to stick to their time allocation. With that, I call Jackie Baillie, leading by example, to speak to and move the motion.

You have up to six minutes, Ms Baillie.

16:01

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): This week is mental health awareness week. Although much progress has been made, in recent years, in how mental health is treated and regarded, so much more still needs to be done. We all know someone who has been affected by mental health difficulties, and the events of recent years, such as lockdowns, have led to a rise in the number of people experiencing mental health problems.

The need to take action to protect the mental health of the people of Scotland is self-evident but, sadly, this Government has failed to do that. Today, some 30,000 children, young people and adults in Scotland are languishing on mental health waiting lists. That is nothing short of shocking, but, although it has been exacerbated by the pandemic, that crisis did not develop overnight. Despite the Scottish National Party Government introducing a national standard, in 2014, that 90 per cent of referrals for child and adolescent mental health services should start treatment within 18 weeks, that target has not been met once.

Around a third of young people who are referred to CAMHS services wait more than 18 weeks for treatment. Statistics that Scottish Labour has obtained show that the number of mental health calls to NHS 24 has risen sevenfold since 2019 and that—horrifyingly—7,576 Scots are thought to have died by suicide in the past decade. Those are not just statistics—they are lives cut brutally and tragically short, and it is incumbent on every single one of us in the chamber to work to ensure that more lives are not avoidably lost.

What must be done to protect the mental health of our nation? We must always remember that mental health issues, like physical health issues, do not drop from the sky. They are often the product of people's circumstances and surroundings, which is why tackling poverty,

unemployment and low-paid, insecure work must be part of a holistic approach to improving mental and physical health for all of Scotland.

Without targeted action to tackle the mental health crisis, more lives will be lost. Despite promise after promise from the SNP Government, staff shortages are continuing to undermine the heroic efforts of our national health service to tackle the mental health crisis. Despite an SNP promise to recruit 1,000 additional community mental health roles, the minister has admitted, in response to me, that not one has yet been recruited—and, by the way, the budget has been slashed. That is nothing short of a catastrophic dereliction of duty on the part of the Government.

Michael Matheson, who I see has now joined us, and Maree Todd may be new in their roles but they have been in Government for a long time and they inherit the mess that was left to them by Humza Yousaf. It is vital that they acknowledge the SNP's failings, listen to NHS workers and act now.

To start, the SNP can end the short-changing of mental health funding in Scotland. In Labour-controlled Wales—I know that SNP members are keen to cite Labour-controlled Wales—mental health funding is 11 per cent of the health budget, and in England it is 10 per cent. In Scotland, it is just below 9 per cent.

With the scale of the mental health crisis that Scotland faces, that makes absolutely no sense and may even be putting lives at risk. That is why the SNP must urgently consider increasing mental health funding to at least 11 per cent of the NHS budget, to bring it into line with Wales—and, indeed, England—and to bolster front-line services. In my area, crisis services, for example, are extremely patchy, and after 8 o'clock at night people might not be able to access a local service.

We know that calls to mental health helplines are skyrocketing and that people in crisis are being left hanging on the telephone far too often. It is time for further investment in NHS 24 to ensure that no call goes unanswered.

With 30,000 Scots, including children, languishing on NHS waiting lists, we need a new referral system and investment in front-line services to support NHS staff. We also need a dedicated mental health worker in every general practice and specialist mental health services in every health board.

To do nothing to tackle the crisis would be nothing short of a dereliction of duty and an abandonment of the people of Scotland. It is time to draw a line under the inaction and get to grips with the crisis. SNP neglect has consequences, and SNP neglect of mental health services must end.

In the name of co-operation, and for the benefit of the people of Scotland, I move the motion in my name and call on everyone in the chamber who understands the scale of the mental health crisis to support our motion at decision time.

I move,

That the Parliament acknowledges Mental Health Awareness Week and, in so doing, is deeply concerned by the mental health crisis in Scotland, with almost 30,000 children, young people and adults on waiting lists; notes that mental health-related calls to NHS24 were almost seven times higher in 2022 than in 2019 and that, tragically, 7,576 people have died from probable suicide in the last decade; considers that staff shortages are undermining efforts to improve care, with the Scottish Government failing to begin the recruitment of the 1,000 additional roles to support community mental health resilience; agrees that funding must be directed into frontline services and community-based services; supports the creation of a new referral system, so that no young person is rejected for treatment, the provision of a dedicated mental health worker in every GP practice and a mental health A&E department in every health board so that patients can be fast-tracked, and calls for mental health spending to be increased to at least 11% of the NHS budget.

16:07

The Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport (Maree Todd): I thank Jackie Baillie for bringing this debate on mental health awareness week to the chamber. Mental health is a fundamentally important topic for all parties.

This year's theme—*anxiety*—is an important one. Many of us will have had direct experience of it over the past few years. Everything that I will briefly touch on during my opening remarks comes back to one core message, which is related to the theme of this week: if you need help for your mental health, please ask for it.

Nobody is saying that we already have a perfect system. Jackie Baillie's motion highlights some legitimate concerns that the Government shares. We hear from individuals, families and our workforce that there can be issues and frustrations with finding and receiving the right help.

We know that we need a power of additional work if we are to see the right services and support consistently in place for the people of Scotland. Our forthcoming mental health and wellbeing strategy, which we will publish in the coming weeks, will describe that work.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): Does the minister recognise that the concern goes far beyond mere frustration, that access to those services is sometimes impossible and that diagnosis of the most critical conditions takes years? It is more than frustration, because there is a complete absence of any practical offer whatsoever.

Maree Todd: I do not agree with that characterisation of the situation that we are in. I acknowledge that some children have been waiting too long for child and adolescent mental health services, but I am absolutely certain that we are seeing an improving trajectory and that we have built the right foundations to improve the situation.

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): Will the minister take an intervention?

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

Maree Todd: I really must make some progress, because I have time for only a short opening speech.

We will publish the accompanying delivery and workforce plans after the summer recess, which will give us time to work with stakeholders and partners on the detail of implementation.

Improving mental health goes even wider than the Labour motion suggests. Among other things, it requires us to address wider social factors—as Jackie Baillie acknowledged in her opening speech—to challenge stigma and to promote good mental wellbeing for everyone.

I agree that doing more of the same will not deliver the transformative change that we need. That will be a key principle of the strategy, and I am sure that we have cross-party agreement on that. Notwithstanding that, my amendment to the motion seeks to restore some balance to the debate. Yes, there are issues, but we are also seeing real progress, and it is important that that is recognised.

Sue Webber: Audit Scotland will publish its report on adult mental health services next month. Is the minister confident that the report will be positive for the Government?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Minister, I can give you a bit of time back.

Maree Todd: Thank you very much, Deputy Presiding Officer.

As always with Audit Scotland reports, I am confident that the Government will read with interest and take on board the comments that are made.

We have seen historic increases in spending. It is a fact that the Scottish Government's core mental health budget has more than doubled since 2020-21. There has been extraordinary work, some of it behind the scenes, by boards to clear long waits. In the past quarter alone, the number of children who were waiting for more than 52 weeks for child and adolescent mental health services decreased by 42 per cent, and the number who were waiting for more than 18 weeks

decreased by 32 per cent. That unseen work has set the conditions for the most sustained, positive changes in CAMHS waiting lists for more than half a decade, and the number of children who started treatment from CAMHS in the most recent quarter is comfortably the highest figure on record.

As I mentioned, our focus cannot be just on specialist services. Over the past two years, we have invested £30 million to establish community-based mental health and wellbeing services for children, young people and their families. More than 45,000 people accessed those services between July and December last year, which reduced inappropriate referrals to specialist services. We have also invested £36 million in our communities mental health and wellbeing fund for adults over the past two years, and a further £15 million has been announced for 2023-24.

I will touch briefly on one specific part of the original motion, which Jackie Baillie raised in her opening speech. The motion refers to an increase in NHS 24 call volumes. Yes, calls are consistently up, but that is for a range of reasons. We have moved the mental health hub to a 24/7 service. More people know that the service exists, because we have signposted to it, as well as to a range of other supports, through our "Mind to Mind" website. It is not just about the volume of the calls but about how we respond to the calls. We have backed NHS 24 with more than £9 million of funding since 2021 to ensure a quality service for everyone. I gently say that we should all take care to avoid using language that could stigmatise those who ask for help.

Are there areas where we need to make more progress more quickly? Yes—absolutely. We have exceeded our commitment to fund more than 800 additional mental health workers, many of whom are working in primary care and community settings, but we know that we need to further enhance the support that is available in primary care. We have had to make difficult decisions on the basis of our current financial situation, but that does not mean that that area is not still a priority.

More generally, we have signalled that, by the end of this parliamentary session, 10 per cent of NHS expenditure should be on mental health and 1 per cent should be on CAMHS.

Jackie Baillie: Will the minister take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister is concluding.

Minister, you need to wind up.

Maree Todd: In my closing minutes, we know that boards face—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, you are concluding, minister.

Maree Todd: We know that boards face a range of pressures but, equally, spending needs to ensure parity between mental and physical health.

Our workforce across services, communities—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, minister—you must conclude and move your amendment.

Maree Todd: Okay. In the spirit of realistic but ambitious improvement, I move amendment S6M-08955.3, to leave out from first “and” to end and insert:

“; understands that many people are struggling with their mental health and wellbeing, so welcomes this debate as an important opportunity to talk openly about issues such as anxiety; recognises the cumulative impact that the COVID-19 pandemic, the conflict in Ukraine, Brexit and the cost of living crisis have had on the mental wellbeing of children, young people and adults across the country; welcomes the fact that mental health spending has doubled in cash terms from £651 million in 2006-07 to £1.3 billion in 2021-22, and that, as a result of that investment, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and psychological therapies staffing has more than doubled; acknowledges that the Scottish Government has exceeded its commitment to fund over 800 additional mental health workers in settings such as A&E departments, GP practices, police custody suites and prisons; notes the aims to increase mental health staffing further, but recognises that supporting wider community resilience is as important as enhancing NHS capacity; welcomes, therefore, the fact that, between July and December 2022, more than 45,000 children, young people and their family members across Scotland accessed community-based mental health support; acknowledges the benefit of the 3,300 grants provided to grassroots community organisations through the Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund for adults in the past two years, with a further £15 million of investment confirmed for 2023-24; notes that, since its launch in 2017, the Distress Brief Intervention programme has provided support to over 40,000 people; recognises that every death lost to suicide is an enormous tragedy, which leaves devastating and long-lasting impacts on families, friends and communities; supports the aims of the work being driven forward by a wide range of partners as a result of the Scottish Government and COSLA’s Suicide Prevention Strategy and Action Plan, published in 2022, and believes that these efforts will be enhanced by the publication in June 2023 of a new Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy, which will focus on further action required to support mental health and wellbeing.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, minister. There really is very little time in hand, so members will have to stick to their allocated speaking times.

I call Sue Webber to speak to and move amendment S6M-08955.1 for up to four minutes.

16:14

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): This week is mental health awareness week, and this year’s official theme is anxiety. More than half of Scots who were surveyed said that anxiety interferes in their daily lives, and, although it is natural to be anxious, for some people those feelings might not

go away. They might get worse or not have a particular cause and become a problem, especially if people do not know what the feelings are or why they are happening. Everyone’s experience of anxiety is different, and not everyone who has anxiety will experience the same symptoms.

Anxiety can become debilitating and affect a person’s performance at work and their personal life. In 2008, that happened to me. There was not one cause but several challenges that I faced—physical pain from an injury, pressure at work and the death of a close friend. I needed time off work. I was lucky—I received support from my employer through their employee assistance programme and, after six weeks, I was on a phased return to work. As I said, I was fortunate. The counselling was arranged quickly and the sessions happened in regular succession.

On the SNP’s watch, Scots across the country are waiting far too long for mental health treatment. CAMHS is the main route to assessment and treatment for children and young people seeking help with their mental health, but we should remember that the SNP has never met its CAMHS target and adult waiting times are still nowhere near good enough. In 2022, almost 9,000 children were refused mental health treatment. Between January and June this year, 4,640 referrals to CAMHS were rejected. Long delays in accessing treatment can lead to more entrenched difficulties by the time a child or young person is able to access a service. Failing to solve the CAMHS crisis today will lead to poor mental health outcomes for future generations, further compounding the issue.

However, it is not just CAMHS that is in crisis under the SNP. The SNP Government froze the mental health budget for 2023-24. Just this weekend, the outgoing Children and Young People’s Commissioner Scotland, Bruce Adamson, said that Nicola Sturgeon had failed to address the issue of children’s mental health. The First Minister, Humza Yousaf, pledged to recruit an additional 1,000 mental health specialists when he was the cabinet secretary for health, but that has been delayed. There is a shortage of mental health beds across Scotland, and there are 190 CAMHS vacancies in Scotland.

Let us not forget that our existing staff are absolutely critical to delivering these services and they are clearly working at the extreme end of their professional capacity, so we must be hyper-aware of their mental wellbeing. Knowing healthcare professionals as I do, I am well aware of how low down the priority list they put their own health and wellbeing. That is evident in the data that was presented in the press over the weekend. Between 2018 and 2022, almost 75,000 NHS staff

members missed work due to anxiety, stress, depression or other mental health issues.

As the largest staffing group in the NHS mental health workforce, nursing staff play a key role in the delivery of services. However, current levels of staff absence due to anxiety, depression and other mental health-related illnesses are extremely worrying. Nursing staff across NHS Scotland are telling us that staff shortages are impacting on their ability to provide safe care for patients and on both their own and their colleagues' wellbeing.

After 16 years in government, the SNP seems to be out of ideas when it comes to tackling mental health. We must look after our existing workforce and help them to keep well so that they can look after the wellness of our population. We need a fresh approach that incorporates modern, efficient, and local solutions into healthcare.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Webber, you must conclude.

Sue Webber: I thought that I had five minutes.

I move amendment S6M-08955.1, to insert at end:

“; raises the issue of increased levels of mental illness among NHS staff, with almost 75,000 staff members being absent due to anxiety, stress, depression or other mental illness between 2018 and 2022; notes that the outgoing Children and Young People's Commissioner said that the former First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, had failed children on a number of issues, including mental health, and reminds the Scottish Government that failing to solve the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) crisis today will lead to poor mental health outcomes for future generations, further compounding the issue.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Apologies—I know that there is a lot of interest and a willingness to engage in the debate, but these short debates do not allow for that and I need to protect the time for business later this afternoon.

I call Alex Cole-Hamilton—you have up to four minutes.

16:18

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I will be brief. I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in the debate and I thank Jackie Baillie for bringing it to the chamber.

I must say that it is the cruellest irony that the minister in charge of the portfolio entreats people with mental ill health issues to come forward, only for them to join the longest queue in the national health service. The frustration that they, their families and the doctors and nurses around them feel is a mark of shame.

As we mark this mental health awareness week, it is important to acknowledge the scale of the

challenge that I have just identified. Of course, it has been added to by the pandemic, which was a time of extraordinary trauma. However, a lot of that trauma already existed and was already not being addressed. The toll that that has taken has increased stress, depression, anxiety and—yes—waiting lists yet further.

We have heard about the focus of this year's mental health awareness week, which is anxiety. We know that 58 per cent of adults in Scotland have in the past two weeks experienced anxiety that interfered with their daily lives. We are a nation on edge. When mental health symptoms are left untreated they can all too often become chronic and can lead to acute mental and physical health issues.

People need support and treatment, but they are just not getting it, with almost 30,000 Scots currently languishing on waiting lists for mental health treatments. As we have heard, in 2014, the SNP Government set a new national standard that 90 per cent of people who were referred to psychological therapy would start their treatment within 19 weeks. The target was set just as Nicola Sturgeon became First Minister of Scotland. It is a dreadful indictment of her time in office that that standard has never been met—not once in the nine years that she sat in Bute house. Two of the three worst years were recorded while Humza Yousaf was Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care.

Mental health nursing staff play a key role in delivery of services. It is troubling that we are facing such a significant staff shortage, with more than 700 vacant posts. There is also a shortfall in nursing students. It is no wonder that services are struggling to meet demand.

It is unsurprising that the strain that staff are under is affecting their wellbeing. More than 70 per cent of members of the Royal College of Nursing have reported working more than their contracted hours at least once a week, while 60 per cent said that they were under far too much pressure at work. The NHS is buckling. Those figures should provide a wake-up call to the Administration. It is completely and utterly disappointing that the SNP-Green Government has cut the mental health budget in real terms by a staggering £50 million since last November. That is outrageous.

In 2021, Parliament voted, through agreement to a motion in my name, to declare a mental health crisis. Only two years on, the situation is even worse. The Government is not only sticking its head in the sand, but is actively making the situation worse through cuts to mental health services. As with so many other issues, it is abundantly clear that this continuity Government is living up to its name, with its abject failure to improve things for the people whom we are sent

here to serve. It lacks the will, the determination and the imagination that are necessary in order to turn the situation around.

Humza Yousaf's NHS recovery plan committed to clearing waiting lists in CAMHS and psychological therapies by March 2023, but it is now May, and we are nowhere. The First Minister and his Government are nowhere. People are stuck on waiting lists and are crying out for something to change. They need new hope now, more than ever.

The Scottish Liberal Democrats in Government would replace and increase funding for mental health services. We would reduce waiting times and roll out mental health professionals to work alongside GPs, police officers and in accident and emergency departments. We would establish a single point of contact for those who are on CAMHS waiting lists so that our young people will no longer be forced to tell their stories over and over again. We have to act, and we have to act now.

16:22

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):

On 12 May 2022, I raised the plight of my constituent, Ryan Caswell, at First Minister's question time. At that point, Ryan had been a delayed discharge patient who was resident in the Carseview centre, the mental health unit in Dundee, for two years and three months. Ryan has complex care needs, including autism spectrum disorder and learning disabilities. Carseview is a deeply inappropriate setting for him. The First Minister described my constituent's case as "unacceptable" and said that she would look into it. However, 370 days have passed and Ryan remains an in-patient at Carseview. In the words of Ryan's mother Irene:

"It has been 3 years, 3 months and 16 days. We are still waiting for the care and treatment to start. We have no idea how this will pan out, but Ryan cannot remain at risk where he is."

No end in sight, no solution offered, no hope given: Ryan has become another example of what the children's commissioner rightly identified as a young person who has been "absolutely failed" by Nicola Sturgeon. She, and her health secretary Humza Yousaf, did nothing. It has been another year of suffering and pain for Ryan and of anxiety and distress for his parents Irene and Paul, whose lives are drifting on, so much less than they should and could be.

The reality of mental health care in Tayside is worlds away from the description that the minister provided in her opening speech and the amendment that she lodged. In the past five years, 345 lives have been lost to suicide in Tayside. It

was relentless campaigning from bereaved and desperate local people that resulted in the Strang report of 2020, which was heavy with urgent recommendations.

The update report of 2021 by Dr Strang has been described to me as

"the worst report in Scottish public life",

because responsible local bodies comprehensively misrepresented what was happening. That debacle resulted in the appointment of the independent oversight and assurance group, which reported at the start of this year. We have had report after report after report—endless paper—but scant change for those who need it.

In the absence of any ministerial action, I led a members' business debate on 8 February this year, during which the then Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care promised an improvement plan for NHS Tayside mental health services by the end of March. That plan is now the latest on the groaning shelves of Ninewells hospital.

There has so far been no response from the Government to that report. Has the minister read it and, crucially, what will she do to ensure that the latest targets that it sets out are finally delivered? Will she accept accountability, given that it was commissioned by the Government after Labour pressure, or will Ryan's plight once again fall foul of the incompetence of this Government?

The chronic issues with mental health services in NHS Tayside have been described to me by the most senior clinicians in Scotland as

"the canary in the coal mine"

of overstretched mental health services across the country.

Every member should be concerned about the situation that is faced by the people of Dundee and Tayside. The minister said that if someone needs help, they should ask. The people of Dundee have been asking for years. Will she actually do something about it?

16:26

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): I remind members that I am a registered mental health nurse, with current Nursing and Midwifery Council registration.

Having been a mental health nurse for more than 30 years, I firmly believe that mental health is one of the most important public health issues that is faced by Scotland today. We know that the pandemic had a significant impact on people's mental health and wellbeing, with necessary restrictions exacerbating some people's existing

mental health problems. On top of that, the cost of living crisis is having a further detrimental impact on people. Poverty in childhood and among adults can cause poor mental health through social stresses, stigma and trauma.

The debate taking place in mental health awareness week affords us all the opportunity to restate our shared commitment to improving the mental health and wellbeing of the nation.

Compared with when I started out in my career as a mental health nurse, people are now speaking far more openly about their mental health challenges and greater numbers of people are, ultimately, seeking help.

Of course, the challenge lies in ensuring that people can access mental health support where and when they need it. I believe that we have taken great strides in that regard, and I will acknowledge two particular examples. Only last month, Scottish Government investment, through the recovery and renewal fund, supported the creation of a new CAMHS outpatient facility at Udston hospital in Hamilton, which serves NHS Lanarkshire. The new facility will support children and young people from my constituency to access high-quality mental health care.

In looking at mental health support for children and young people, one of the policies that I am most proud of having driven when I was Minister for Mental Health was on ensuring that every secondary school has access to counselling services. Counselling can help children and young people to explore, understand and overcome issues in their lives—whether they are due to exam stress, trauma or bereavement—and to improve their resilience. The benefit of the service is that it meets the needs of the individual at an early stage and complements the range of approaches that are already available in schools to support the mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing of children and young people.

From my constituency casework, I know that although services might be available to individuals, some people are experiencing unacceptable waits for mental health treatment.

We also continue to hear of the tragedy of people dying by suicide. Although the number of such deaths has fallen in recent years, the Scottish Government must continue to use every lever at its disposal to drive it down further.

The Scottish Government is investing and is taking action to help to ensure that people can access a range of types of help to match their needs, and at the earliest stage possible. Direct investment in mental health services has more than doubled since 2020-21, and the published budget for mental health services will increase by 139 per cent over this session of Parliament. The

Scottish Government is continuing to seek further improvements and to invest in growing the workforce.

CAMHS staffing has more than doubled under this Government to a current all-time high. Indeed, in NHS Lanarkshire, which serves my constituency, there has been an increase of more than 400 per cent in CAMHS staffing since September 2006.

As a result of those actions and continued investment, we are now seeing evidence of significant and sustained progress in many areas across Scotland, including continuing record levels of activity and some of the most positive changes in waiting lists that we have seen for more than half a decade.

The Scottish Government is committed to improving mental health, whether that is through the creation and reform of services or through investment in the workforce. We will continue to take actions to ensure that the people of Scotland have access to the mental health care and support that they need in order that they can navigate the challenges that they face.

16:30

Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con): Poor mental health is a serious public health challenge. Most of all, it can be very frightening and isolating for those who experience it.

The reality is that Scottish mental health services simply are not meeting existing levels of demand. Thousands of children and adults are on waiting lists, and thousands more are being rejected for mental health treatment after their initial referral. Furthermore, on the SNP's watch, 1.5 million working days have been lost in the NHS due to mental illness since 2018.

There is a mental health crisis in Scotland. After 16 years at the helm, the SNP Government—along with its Green partners—must take full responsibility for the mismanagement of our mental health services.

Over the past year, I have been supporting a constituent in the north-east and her family whose horrendous story brings into sharp relief why the system must change.

After receiving successful treatment in a central belt mother and baby unit for postpartum psychosis, my constituent was sectioned in the Carseview centre in Tayside, where mental health services were so poor that they were subject to an independent inquiry by Dr David Strang.

The transition from perinatal mental health services to general adult services was abrupt and distressing. My constituent was separated from

her children and her support system. She was very, very scared. She described the experience as being

“like living a nightmare; the whole experience just didn’t seem real.”

My constituent’s sister has been advocating on her behalf and has lodged a petition with the Scottish Parliament to improve maternal mental health services.

The Scottish Government must do better for women as they navigate motherhood. It is shocking that the mental health strategy mentions “women” only four times—and one of those is in a footnote. The strategy is gender blind, even though women are twice as likely to be diagnosed with anxiety as men.

The Scottish Conservatives believe that we need modern, efficient and local solutions for mental health care. For communities across Scotland and in the north-east, we want to see local delivery. I have raised the closure of the Mulberry unit for acute mental health care at Stracathro hospital numerous times with the Scottish Government. The unit closed because of insufficient staffing, which is a problem that we keep seeing in healthcare delivery in the north-east. Distressed and vulnerable patients in Angus now must travel many miles for mental health treatment. How can that be right?

I urge the Scottish Government to stop the platitudes and recycled policy pledges. It must get a grip on a crisis that is affecting thousands of people now and that will haunt thousands in the future if they do not get the care and treatment that they need.

16:34

Foysoyl Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): Scotland’s mental health crisis has reached breaking point. Currently, more than 30,000 people are on a waiting list for mental health support; mental health-related calls to NHS 24 are seven times higher now than in 2019; and, in the past two years, more than 4,000 patients have waited over a year before they have even been allocated their first appointment. That is unacceptable.

Covid-19 and the cost of living crisis have placed mental health at the forefront of the political agenda, as they have caused the Scottish population to experience amplified feelings of anxiety. The theme of this year’s mental health awareness week is anxiety. Children and young people studying at universities and colleges can often feel overwhelmed by stress and anxiety.

Research by the Mental Health Foundation last year found that 64 per cent of college students in Scotland had low mental wellbeing and 55 per

cent had hidden their mental health problems due to shame. However, students in Scotland are not able to access the help and support that they desperately need. If young people cannot rely on the NHS for it, they must have alternative routes for seeking counselling and advice on mental health issues.

Universities and colleges are places where young people can seek help and advice. Counselling services at universities and colleges provide students with extra support at a time in their lives when stress and anxiety can seriously impact their mental health. Counsellors at our universities do a tremendous and essential job by supporting staff and students to find solutions to their problems, yet many are now facing uncertainty about their jobs and the future of counselling services at universities and colleges, because funding from the Scottish Government will end in July. Up to 80 counselling jobs in higher and further education across Scotland are set to be cut if additional funding is not allocated.

University or college can be a stressful and challenging environment for many young adults, and the Covid pandemic has only exacerbated that. Counsellors at universities and colleges do vital work to reduce stress and anxiety and improve mental health. Their work massively reduces the pressure on NHS services at a time when the NHS is already outsourcing children’s mental health services to reduce waiting times.

The Scottish Government must allocate continued funding now to save the 80 counselling jobs across Scottish universities and colleges. That vital service must continue to be available to all students who need that little bit of extra support. During this mental health awareness week, the Scottish Government should make a commitment to students across Scotland that support at university and college will continue to be there for those who need it.

16:38

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I know simply from my casework about the pressure on mental health services. It is a pressure that, in my 24 years as an MSP, I have not seen before. Although I wish that referrals could be accelerated, I recognise that the volume of referrals has risen. Several factors are causing unforeseen pressure on services. One is Covid. Another is the cost of living and inflation in energy and food bills, with inflation on the price of food reaching almost 19 per cent. Another is that people are more likely—and this is a good thing—to identify that they have a mental health problem. Both the Labour motion and the Tory amendment would have more credibility if they even referenced those factors.

I will start with the devastating fallout from Covid. On the situation in Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale, I received the following response from the chief executive of NHS Borders:

“Regrettably, the Community Mental Health Team were experiencing pressure from the Covid-19 backlog and the demand for the Neurodevelopmental Disorder assessments. As a result, NHS Borders are implementing the existing secondary care referral criteria. Therefore, only patients assessed as meeting level 4 (complex) will progress for assessment by the CMHT. This is in line with the National Autism Implementation Team recommendations”.

The Mental Health Foundation has said:

“National and localised ‘lockdowns’ ... removed the social connections and day to day support that significantly contribute to positive mental health and happiness.”

I move on to inequality. Of course, that takes me on to inflation, which is currently over 10 per cent generally, with food price inflation still running at over 19 per cent—those are Office for National Statistics figures. Added to that is the cost of heating and credit cards, never mind mortgages. The Tories’ cost of living crisis means that the poorest and most vulnerable in our society are more likely to experience poorer mental and physical wellbeing, lower life satisfaction and feelings of loneliness. That is supported by new research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, which states:

“More than a quarter of adults in Scotland have accessed the NHS due to the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on their mental or physical health.”

That is further confirmed by the findings of See Me Scotland, which in February found that 59 per cent of people in Scotland say that the cost of living crisis is impacting on their mental health. A poll carried out for the Royal College of Psychiatrists in Scotland found that 52 per cent of Scots are concerned about the impact of rising prices on their mental health. There was no mention of that from any of the Conservative speakers in the debate.

The impact of the pandemic was bad enough, especially for those who were already vulnerable, but it has been compounded by the highest inflation rates in generations. What is welcome, but challenging, is the gradual erosion of the stigmatisation of mental health issues. More people are therefore coming forward for assessment in the first instance, which is excellent. However, it is no wonder that, in that context, demands are high and pressures are unparalleled. The Opposition parties should at the very least acknowledge that and, in the case of the Tories, they should admit a modicum of responsibility, given the cost of living crisis.

16:42

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): I will focus my remarks on two issues. One is something that I believe we should do more of to protect mental wellbeing and the other is a measure that I hope that we can explore to prevent suicide in young people.

In highlighting the issue of improving and protecting young people’s mental wellbeing, I first acknowledge that there will always be people who need support from in-patient or out-patient mental health services. However, I believe that there are strategies that we could adopt to ensure that we improve and protect mental wellbeing.

I recently visited Larbert high school in my region and met a number of the wonderful school nurses who support children in primary and secondary schools across Falkirk. They told me about all the projects that they deliver on how to recognise and deal with emotions and stress and how to recognise when something that people are feeling has become a wider mental health issue. The nurses run sessions for first years, who might feel anxious about coming to high school for the first time, and for pupils in secondaries 4, 5 and 6, for whom exam time can be a particularly pressured time.

The nurses teach young people how to find things that bring them relief and comfort, and that they can speak about issues with their peers or with the nurses and find a resolution. The nurses have also been working with young people who have found the transition back to in-person schooling after the pandemic tough.

In primary schools, it is about giving children the tools to be able to put a name to what they are feeling and describe what made them feel that way. It is about being able to communicate how they need help and what would help them to feel better—or what made them feel happy, if that is what they are experiencing. The nurses are a hugely passionate team. They are dedicated to improving the lives of the children in those schools, whom they definitely treat like their own bairns.

I certainly did not have anything close to that at school, and I believe that, through building resilience and healthy coping strategies, as well as changing attitudes towards speaking about mental health, the programmes that those school nurses are running could help young people as they transition to adulthood.

For young people who need CAMHS referrals, we need to ensure that they get the help in the way that they need it. Talking therapies and social prescribing might suit young people better, and we need to ensure that those who are in crisis get the support that they need. I currently have a concern

about how we support children and young people who have suicidal intent or suicidal ideation. Rightly, young people should be able to say who has access to their information, who it is shared with and whether parents or guardians should be told when someone could come to harm.

A constituent shared with me the story of her 16-year-old son, Scott Martin, who was treated under CAMHS. Scott had been experiencing suicidal thoughts during an acutely bad period of mental health. His parents were not told of the severity of his mental health symptoms, and he tragically completed suicide. At the start of this parliamentary session, I met his mum, who spoke with so much love about her son, but she regretted that the thoughts that her son was having were not shared with her so that she could have supported him. I encourage everyone to have a look at the Scott Martin Foundation page if they can.

We need to address that issue and find a balance between protecting young people's confidentiality and ensuring that someone who loves and supports the person, whether they live at home or not, knows the severity of their condition. It should not be about breaching confidences; it should be about how we ensure that young people are safe.

While we seek to improve mental wellbeing, we must be aware that there will always be people who will need mental health support. We need to ensure that the sector has the workforce that it needs, that services are accessible and that we have the correct treatment and support mix for everyone.

I encourage everyone who is listening and feels that this debate has resonated with them to reach out for support. For anyone who needs it, the helpline number for Samaritans is 116 123, and the charity's Twitter account is staffed 24 hours a day. We all need support from time to time. If you need that help, please do not struggle alone.

16:46

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): I absolutely agree with Labour's decision to bring this matter to the chamber today. The unique problems that are faced by people who live outside Scotland's major cities, in smaller towns, villages and rural communities, are often overlooked in such debates.

Today, at an event in the Parliament, I spoke to a mother who told me that it took two and a half years for her son to be diagnosed with autism. Her son is now 10 and is waiting for occupational health support. He cannot read or write. That young man is being left behind. He is being excluded from his right to education because of a

lack of support caused by 16 years of an SNP Government that has failed generations of people with mental health problems. The Government has failed to deliver on the promises that were made in the NHS recovery plan to reduce waiting times and to begin the recruitment of 1,000 mental health staff, which was promised in the 2021-22 programme for government. In addition, the mental health budget has been frozen, as we have heard.

On top of the mental health challenges that people in Scotland face today, remoteness, isolation and small town stigma can exacerbate problems for people who live in rural areas. Yesterday, at a countryside day that was attended by 1,200 primary 5 pupils, I spoke to many of the volunteers and rural workers. They told me about the daily challenges that they face, including stigma, rising input costs for farmers, safety concerns and the uncertain policy landscape. They spend long times not seeing anybody and can suffer from social isolation, but they are also subjected to abuse for simply doing their job in managing our land. Those pressures have had a serious detrimental impact on their mental health.

In the United Kingdom, four in five farmers under 40 cite poor mental health as the biggest problem that they face. We have a plan to tackle that by creating a network of trained mental health advisers across Scotland's rural communities. As we discussed in my members' business debate six days ago, those advisers would be recruited from the community—from local rugby clubs, from people such as vets and feed merchants who go down to the farm gate and from local shopkeepers. People who live in small towns, villages and more remote areas would be comfortable in engaging with those individuals, and they would be able to identify the signs of poor mental health. They would be able to check in, to provide mental health first aid during moments of distress and to encourage people to learn how to identify the signs of poor mental health and how to engage with the available resources. They would also be able to refer people, when appropriate, to more formal care, such as the RSABI counselling service or the NHS, which would ensure that the right care was received.

We need to take action. The Scottish Conservatives have a solution, and I hope that the minister and the cabinet secretary will engage with us on that. The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands attended a roundtable with me last week to debate those proposals with stakeholders, and her willingness was refreshing. We also want to replicate some of the fantastic work that the third sector and groups such as Farmstrong have done.

I understand that the individual policies will not be a silver bullet, but we are putting forward ideas that can make a difference. We want to work with the Government to see those plans come to fruition; to help people who struggle with their mental health; and to drive CAMHS waiting times down—which would mean that the mother who spoke to me today could get help to engage her 10-year-old son in full-time education so that her family could function properly once again.

16:50

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): I, too, welcome the opportunity to debate the issue of mental health during this mental health awareness week which, this year, focuses on anxiety.

All Governments are facing multiple and wide-ranging challenges in their efforts to ensure good mental health and wellbeing. Those challenges are cross-cutting, complex and everyone's business—a public health issue that we will grapple with for some time.

The Scottish Government's mental health strategy sets out the action that is required to prevent, and respond to, poor mental health, including increasing the mental health workforce in A and E settings, GP practices, police custody settings and prisons.

Not in our wildest dreams did we predict the significant mental health impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, any reference to which is disappointingly absent from the Labour motion and the Tory and Liberal Democrat amendments.

Furthermore, although they include a range of challenges and points, the motion and those amendments, in my view, lack context and focus to one degree or another—the proverbial Lego pieces thrown in the air. They make no reference to the cost of living crisis, the impact of Brexit Britain, the limited fiscal levers and many other highly relevant factors that significantly compromise mental health.

We know the linkages that exist between poverty, poor mental health, offending and other vulnerability factors. I want to focus on those individuals who are in poor mental health and come into contact with the police. We have been grappling with that issue for many years; it normally involves individuals who are distressed and often intoxicated, who contact the police seeking help. The Criminal Justice Committee has been considering that issue, too.

According to Police Scotland, demand in relation to mental health increases between the hours of 7 pm and 3 am, when services are often no longer available. Mental health incidents

routinely take up around 8 hours, and a recent evaluation estimated the cost to policing at £14.6 million per annum, with each visit to A and E estimated to cost the NHS around £5,000.

Section 297 of the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003 makes provision for officers to “remove” a person who is suspected of having “a mental disorder”

“to a place of safety”

when they are found “in a public place”.

However, most people are in a private place—their home—and officers are not trained to recognise mental disorder, neither should they be. That piece of legislation does not work; it leaves officers to use their initiative with limited or no practical options available to them—in effect, making the system work.

The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that the mental health strategy is data and intelligence driven, and I very much welcome the work of Police Scotland to develop a dashboard to quantify the number of mental-health-related incidents that police attend.

Of course, a cohort of the people who are found in those circumstances enter police custody, and I welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to increase healthcare staff in custody settings. A range of models are, indeed, already in place across Scotland, including on-site 24/7 healthcare practitioners, hub models and on-call GP models.

I also welcome His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland's—

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Thank you, Ms Nicol. I must ask you to conclude your remarks at that point.

We move to winding up speeches, and I call Sandesh Gulhane.

16:55

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): The Scottish Conservatives welcome this debate during mental health awareness week 2023. I wear this green ribbon from the Mental Health Foundation Scotland to show my support.

Sue Webber rightly highlighted the debilitating issues of anxiety and was so brave to give us her personal story.

We are at a critical moment for mental health in Scotland. Tess White explained why the SNP strategy is gender blind. As a general practitioner, I am seeing more and more people with mental health issues, ranging from children to the elderly, and as a result of the SNP cutting funding, we have no link workers.

There is an urgent need for radical change to how mental health support and services are developed, resourced and delivered. The SNP-Green Government is still almost 20 per cent off meeting its child and adolescent mental health services target. As Sue Webber pointed out, that will cause a problem for the adults of tomorrow.

In 2022, almost 9,000 children were refused mental health treatment. The outgoing Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland, Bruce Adamson, said that Nicola Sturgeon failed to address the issue of children's mental health. As for adult mental health, in 2022, more than 3,000 adults were refused mental health treatment.

Between 2018 and 2022, almost 75,000 NHS staff members missed work due to anxiety, stress, depression and other mental health issues. That exacerbates staffing issues, which Tess White told us were the cause of the closure of the Mulberry unit, resulting in long travel times for vulnerable people, and there is more: Humza Yousaf's pledge to recruit an additional 1,000 mental health specialists has been delayed.

Gillian Mackay, Alex Cole-Hamilton and Clare Haughey spoke about one of the most devastating consequences of poor mental health, which is suicide. It affects people from across society. Each suicide is a tragedy that could have been prevented with the right help at the right time. Suicide does not affect only the person who died; their loved ones suffer greatly, and there is simply not enough help, despite the efforts of charities such as the Scottish Association for Mental Health. I commend the British Transport Police, which I met this morning, for its approach to finding people in crisis and getting them the help that they need.

Under the SNP's watch, Scots across the country are waiting far too long for mental health treatment. The Scottish Government's own child and adolescent mental health target has never been met, and waiting times for adult services are nowhere near good enough.

From one devolved policy area to another, the SNP-Green Government comes to this chamber with big announcements, but its record on delivery is abysmal. We have seen no evidence yet that this SNP-Green Government has the wherewithal when it comes to tackling mental health. It lacks ideas. It needs a fresh approach that incorporates modern, efficient and local solutions into healthcare.

Let us see mental health ambulances and crisis cafes, which the Scottish Conservatives have called for, rolled out across Scotland to help people who are struggling with their mental health to get the support that they need. We call on the

SNP-Green Government to implement bespoke solutions for our rural communities, such as establishing networks of trained mental health advisers, which was thoroughly explained by Rachael Hamilton.

Finally, we call on the SNP-Green Government to wake up and realise that it has a duty of care to its NHS workforce. More than 700 registered mental health nurse posts are vacant—a vacancy rate of 9.5 per cent. We call on the Scottish Government to get a grip of reality, stop this self-congratulatory nonsense, as we saw in yesterday's Covid vaccination debate, and focus on delivering the solution.

My final remark is to encourage everyone to talk and, most importantly, to listen and to create a safe space for those who are struggling with their mental health.

I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests as a practising NHS GP.

16:59

Maree Todd: I thank all members for their contributions. As always, I am convinced that speakers from all parties ultimately want the same thing: a high-functioning mental health system that provides the right help at the right time at all levels of need. It does not matter when or where anyone asks for help with their mental health and wellbeing—the system should respond to make sure that they get that help quickly.

I will further unpick one of the points that I made during my opening remarks in relation. Reducing stigma is foundational. It takes courage to ask for help and we know that a barrier to doing so can be the fear of being judged. There is so much good work being done every day by services, communities and the third sector to tackle stigma. We can also lead by example in this chamber.

I will pick up on the issue of rejected referrals. CAMHS is a very specialist service and we know that it will be the right service for only a small proportion of children and young people. We want all children and young people to get the right support at the right time. There is record investment in our CAMHS system, which is currently seeing the most positive changes in waiting lists that we have seen in the past decade. We have also invested £30 million in the past two years to provide alternative community-based health supports for children and young people. Those services were accessed by 45,000 people between July and December last year. As well as that, we have introduced a national CAMHS specification that includes a clear expectation that children and young people whose referral is not accepted for CAMHS are sensitively and

appropriately signposted to a more suitable service.

I am confident that our forthcoming mental health and wellbeing strategy is based on a thorough understanding of the issues that have been raised today. Those issues have been accurately and fairly articulated during the debate. The strategy will also be based on what we have seen done well—on the fantastic work across Scotland that provides a blueprint for what good looks like.

Jackie Baillie: I am grateful to the minister for taking an intervention. I would also be grateful to know whether the percentage of the health budget that is spent on mental health will increase. If we look at the experience under the SNP over the past decade, we see that the percentage of the budget that is spent on mental health in the NHS has decreased.

Maree Todd: Jackie Baillie is well aware that part of the Bute house agreement between ourselves and the Green Party is that we are aiming for 10 per cent of the health budget to be spent on mental health, and we are on track to reach that aim.

The services are working to meet their waiting times targets, but they also do many other things. There is the on-going expansion of our digital offer, or the further £15 million investment in our communities mental health and wellbeing fund for adults. Those are the things that we see working around Scotland at the moment. That fund will provide continued support to grass-roots community groups, playing a vital role in building resilience, tackling social isolation and addressing mental health inequalities. On Monday, I visited a service in Dundee that provides support for families who are awaiting a CAMHS assessment for neurodiversity.

Michael Marra: Will the minister give way?

The Presiding Officer: The minister is concluding.

Maree Todd: There are so many examples of good practice across the system for us to build on, as well as continuously improving elements of the current offer that we know are lacking. I am determined to strike that balance so that we move forward to achieve the vision of our forthcoming strategy, which is

“of a Scotland, free from stigma and inequality, where everyone fulfils their right to achieve the best mental health and wellbeing possible”.

17:03

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): Despite the harrowing stories from today’s debate, I am pleased to be closing it on behalf of Scottish

Labour. Why? Because the Government needs to be held to account. Given the minister’s contribution, it is absolutely right that we in Labour focus in our time to lead debates in the chamber on the crisis in mental health that is impacting so many across our country and putting significant pressure on NHS and community services.

The minister is new to post and “confident”, and I hope that she delivers. However, after reading the SNP amendment and listening to the minister’s contributions, people could be forgiven for thinking that all was well with the provision of mental health services in Scotland, but there has been a failure by the Government, and we need to be honest about that. I ask back-bench SNP members to be honest, because part of their role is to hold their front-bench colleagues to account. Yet again, the SNP pats itself on the back, blames every factor other than the obvious one—its governance—and still refuses to see the urgent need for systemic change in this area.

Across the chamber, we all agree that nothing is more important than the wellbeing of our population. That includes their physical, economic and social wellbeing; critically, it also includes their mental wellbeing. As we have heard in the debate, and as is set out in Labour’s motion, there are almost 30,000 children, young people and adults on waiting lists. Adults from our most deprived areas are more likely to experience anxiety and depression and, tragically, are more likely to die from suicide.

Despite all that, the key commitment to hire 1,000 mental health specialists to help to improve community mental health services has not even started to be delivered. That is not representative of a Government that prioritises mental health treatment. It is representative of a Government whose inability to address staff shortages undermines efforts to improve care—a Government that is no stranger to a strategy but which has a poor relationship with delivery.

As my colleague Jackie Baillie mentioned, and as our motion says, the number of mental health-related calls to NHS 24 was almost seven times higher in 2022 than it was in 2019. We all accept that the pandemic had a significant role to play in that, but it would be disingenuous to suggest that that is when the problem started. The challenges that we face today with the delivery of mental health services in Scotland are a result of long-term inaction by the Scottish Government. Our communities, our mental health workforce and our patients deserve so much more.

We must all echo the call of my colleague Jackie Baillie for at least 11 per cent of the overall NHS budget to be directed towards mental health services. I urge the Government to look at that again. I also ask the minister to address the

question that my colleague asked about the research and analysis by the Royal College of Psychiatrists. Proportionately, Scotland's mental health budget is less now than it was a decade ago. Will the SNP Government address that?

We must also look at how the budget can be targeted and our investment focused on community-based services. As well as having a focus on early intervention and CAMHS for our young people, we need to address the root cause of the loneliness and isolation that members of our elderly population experience. Such targeted spending must be underpinned by a willingness to support people in our most deprived areas to tackle the prominent and divisive health inequalities that exist in Scotland.

Our call for the provision of a dedicated mental health worker in every GP practice and a mental health A and E department in every health board so that patients can be fast-tracked should not be seen as controversial. The minister should get behind some of the suggestions that have been made.

The crisis in mental health treatment in Scotland is concerning and damaging. Time and again, it is our most vulnerable who are let down by the Scottish Government. It knows—as, I am sure, do SNP back benchers—that its performance in this area has been unacceptable. We must be honest and look to shift in the right direction. More warm words and self-congratulatory comments will not cut it. The mental health crisis demands action, and if the SNP will not deliver, it should step aside, because someone has to.

Complaint

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-08946, in the name of Martin Whitfield, on the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's 10th report in 2023, session 6.

I call Martin Whitfield to speak to and move the motion on behalf of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee.

17:09

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): As convener of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, I have the responsibility of lodging and speaking to motions seeking the Parliament's agreement to the committee's recommendation of a sanction when the committee has concluded that a breach of the conduct rules has occurred.

The consultative steering group on the Scottish Parliament recommended a rigorous code of conduct for MSPs, as, in its view, the Scottish people deserve a Parliament and members that the people of Scotland can trust and respect. The code of conduct sets out the standards of conduct for MSPs. Given the statutory underpinning of much of the code, we, as parliamentarians—as lawmakers—must take the rules seriously and adhere to them.

The code also provides for the enforcement of the rules. Over four weeks, the SPPA Committee gave detailed and thorough consideration to the report submitted to us by the Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland on the complaint made against Maggie Chapman MSP that she had failed to declare a registered financial interest. We carefully considered the provisions of the Interests of Members of the Scottish Parliament Act 2006 and the code of conduct in relation to declarations of interest.

We concluded, unanimously, that Maggie Chapman MSP had failed to declare a registered financial interest—namely, the remuneration that she had received by virtue of her employment as the chief operating officer of Edinburgh Rape Crisis centre—during the proceedings relating to that registered financial interest at the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee on 31 May 2022. We agreed with the commissioner's conclusion that Maggie Chapman MSP had breached the 2006 act and the code of conduct for MSPs.

The central purpose of the requirement to register and declare interests is to provide transparency. That transparency makes certain

registrable interests public through their being published on the individual member's entry in the register of interests. That standards regime aims to ensure that somebody watching or reading parliamentary proceedings is made aware of a financial interest that could influence or give the appearance of influencing a member's ability to participate in a disinterested manner in any proceedings of this Parliament.

That transparency was missing at the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee on 31 May 2022. When Maggie Chapman asked a question of the chief executive of Rape Crisis Scotland that referenced the net worth of Rape Crisis centres in Scotland, she did not, by means of a declaration, make it known that she had a registered financial interest by virtue of the remuneration that she had received as the chief operating officer of Edinburgh Rape Crisis centre. Thus, that transparency, which is central to the understanding of any interests that could influence us as MSPs, was not there.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): I do not dispute that an inadvertent breach took place, but what Parliament is being asked to vote on is a sanction. I would appreciate it if the committee's convener could explain why the committee has departed so significantly from precedent with the sanction. In the cases of multiple members who are in the chamber today, previous breaches were found in relation to failing to declare a former employer and in relation to direct financial interests—gifts to the tune of thousands of pounds that had not been declared—and no sanction was issued. Can the convener explain why a sanction has been issued in this case? It is a serious departure from precedent.

Martin Whitfield: I will deal with that matter, as it is specifically dealt with in the committee's unanimous report, which has been published and can be read by members in the chamber and people outside it who are watching and holding us to account.

We live in an age when there is a great deal of scepticism and mistrust of politicians. In order to challenge those perceptions, it is incumbent on us to act with integrity and to respect the rules in the code of conduct. It is also incumbent on us, in certain circumstances, to exclude a member from the proceedings of Parliament when that member has failed to comply with the requirement to declare an interest.

We fail ourselves and we undermine those founding principles if we do not uphold the requirements of our standards regime. For those reasons, I intend to write to all MSPs again next week, reminding them of the declaration requirements and encouraging them to seek

advice from the clerks when they have any doubts about the correct approach to declarations.

With regard to the sanction that the committee has unanimously suggested, there are differences in this case. The committee is not required to follow a rule of precedent but deals with each case individually, fairly and following the rules of natural justice as it appears before us.

The committee's unanimous decision is to recommend the exclusion of Maggie Chapman MSP from one meeting of the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee, and it is, I believe, a proportionate one. The committee has taken its role seriously, seeking to embed the principles of natural justice and fairness in its deliberations. For the reputation of the Parliament and the members of it, I urge those in the chamber to support the motion.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's 10th Report, 2023 (Session 6), Complaint against Maggie Chapman MSP (SP Paper 366), and agrees to impose the sanction recommended in the report that Maggie Chapman MSP be excluded from the first meeting of the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee that is held after this motion is agreed.

17:16

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): As a member of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, I take the scrutiny and governance of Parliament and its members very seriously. The committee was unanimous regarding the consultation and consideration and the decision that we reached.

The committee was of the view that Maggie Chapman's registered financial interest—that is, the remuneration that she received by virtue of her employment as the chief operating officer of Edinburgh Rape Crisis Centre—was relevant to the proceedings of the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee on 31 May 2022.

The view of all the members of the committee was that, in keeping with the principles that underpin the code of conduct, the member should not just take into account their own view in the assessment of whether a declaration relates to committee proceedings, but should also consider whether a fair-minded and impartial observer would consider that the declarable interest could influence the member or give the appearance that the member's ability to act impartially was prejudiced.

The committee considered that a person who watched or read the proceedings might reasonably consider there to be a connection between Edinburgh Rape Crisis Centre and Rape Crisis

Scotland. The committee members take very seriously any breach of the requirements in relation to failure to declare a registrable financial interest before taking part in any proceedings of Parliament relating to that matter, and the unanimous verdict of the committee was that the code was breached. That cemented the view and findings of the commissioner.

Members can seek advice from the committee's clerks as to how any question on any matter relates to registrations and declarations of interest. The integrity and reputation of this Parliament and its members should always be paramount. Those of us who are privileged to serve as members of this Parliament should, at all times, act to uphold its reputation and that of its proceedings in accordance with the code of conduct. When Parliament delegates a decision to the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee and the committee comes back with a unanimous decision, that decision should be respected.

17:18

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

We, as members of the Scottish Parliament, have the privilege of serving the people of Scotland. We must do that in their best interests and as transparently as possible. It is right that they know of any interests that we may have that could influence our decision making. While we must not allow those interests to influence our work, we need to go further. We need to be clear and transparent about interests where a member of the public could reasonably believe that those interests would influence our decision making. It is very easy for us to make a judgment about what does or does not influence our activities, but that might not be apparent to an onlooker.

I do not think anyone in the chamber would believe that they are influenced by the things that we declare in our entry in the register of members' interests. It is quite the opposite—we would all avoid things that would in any way compromise our ability to act freely.

However, we must understand that our constituents do not know us personally. We must also recognise how they might reasonably believe that we could be influenced by certain interests. That is why we have a register of interests and why we as MSPs must take every step to ensure that we abide by the rules regarding the register of interests and the declaration of those interests.

I thank the committee and the commissioner for their work on this case. I note that the report was agreed unanimously by the committee and that the penalty that it proposes is not overly detrimental. However, it provides a useful reminder to us all to be meticulous in registering and declaring our

interests. For that reason, I will support the committee's recommendations and urge colleagues to do the same.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I seek your guidance on a general point. In my time in Parliament we have had several instances of standards recommendations and discipline of various members, but I am concerned that the issue raised by Ross Greer has merit in that we do not appear to keep a note of precedent. In any court proceedings, there is a note of precedent of the kind of penalties that have been imposed in similar circumstances.

All that I ask is about who and why and whether we should keep a note of precedents of decisions made in the circumstances and the various disciplinary consequences that occur for members. I think that that is fair. The issue does not influence my decision in this case, but we have to take a view on it in fairness to any member who may subsequently be subject to disciplinary proceedings.

The Presiding Officer: I thank Ms Grahame for her point of order. The convener addressed some of the points raised in Ms Grahame's point of order, and pointed out that there is no precedent. The Parliament will decide on the matter in due course.

17:21

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): I thank members of the SPPA Committee and the Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland for their consideration of this case.

As a former member of the committee, I recognise its important work in upholding the values and standards of this institution. The Green group therefore respects the decision that has been made by the SPPA Committee and the commissioner that my colleague Maggie Chapman breached the code of conduct, and we do not wish to reopen that decision.

However, we struggle to agree with the decision to impose a sanction, because it goes against the recent precedent set by the Parliament in dealing with omissions to declare a financial interest. Since the start of session 5 in 2016, the SPPA Committee has upheld five complaints against members relating to a failure to declare a registered financial interest, and only one of those resulted in a sanction.

In that case, the member in question had asked parliamentary questions on an issue in which they held a live financial interest and could have

potentially benefited financially from the outcome. It was also the second time that a complaint was upheld against them on the same issue, the first time having resulted in no sanction.

In another more recent case, a member failed to make verbal declarations of substantial gifts from a lobbying organisation, but the committee concluded that

“the finding of a breach is sanction enough.”

The case against Maggie Chapman, however, relates to a previous employment that had long since concluded at the time that the item of business took place in Parliament, so there was no way that Ms Chapman could have benefited financially from the subject that was under discussion on that day.

I am concerned, because the decision sets a precedent for declaring past employment, suggesting that every member in the chamber remains financially tied to all our previous employers for an indefinite period. Imposing a sanction today also undermines the previous position that members are able to make their own judgment on these matters.

In another case, again in 2016, the SPPA Committee admonished a member but imposed no further sanction because

“it is a matter of judgment for the member on whether a registered interest is sufficiently relevant to particular proceedings to require a declaration.”

Yet in this case, the committee has decided that it was not sufficient for Maggie Chapman to use her own judgment, despite her clearly making no attempt to conceal her previous employment, which was declared in her written register of interest.

Martin Whitfield: Will the member give way?

Mark Ruskell: I would like to make progress in laying out our concerns, but I will give way to the committee convener.

Martin Whitfield: I am very grateful. As a point of clarification, does the member agree that the judgment of the individual member must always err on the side of being transparent to those who are watching, rather than it just being about the judgment of the individual, which is the wording in the guidance?

Mark Ruskell: Indeed—but I have laid out the circumstances in which the case emerged and I do not believe that an incorrect judgment was made in that regard. Many members who are looking at that and previous cases that have come to the chamber will now have doubts in their minds about when it is and when it is not appropriate to declare a particular interest.

It is the view of my colleagues in the Green group that our colleague appears to be being held to a different set of standards than previous members who were found wanting in relation to much more substantial breaches, where direct financial interests were actually at stake. She is also not being given the benefit of the doubt, which other members have been afforded. The following quotation is from a decision in 2020: when a member had similarly failed to declare previous employment, the committee concluded that

“the complaint ... was not related to a matter for which”

the member

“could have gained any financial benefit and there was no attempt to conceal the information, which”

was

“made available on the Parliament’s website.”

Those words are equally applicable to Maggie Chapman’s case, yet she is now being sanctioned by the Parliament, and that is a departure.

In closing, if the motion is approved, it potentially has implications for all members. There will be an urgent need for revised and detailed guidance to members on what should reasonably be declared for inclusion in their declaration of members’ interests and clerks and the convener will need to address that in the weeks to come. We recognise how vital honesty and transparency are in the dealings of the chamber, but my colleague has been honest and transparent at every stage of the process. Fairness and consistency are just as crucial—

The Presiding Officer: You must conclude, Mr Ruskell.

Mark Ruskell: We believe that those qualities are lacking in the recommendation today.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee’s 10th report in 2023, session 6.

Business Motions

17:27

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-08986, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 23 May 2023

2.00 pm Time for Reflection
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Topical Questions (if selected)
followed by Scottish Government Debate: Scottish Connections Framework
followed by Committee Announcements
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 24 May 2023

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy; Finance and Parliamentary Business
followed by Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)
 5.10 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Thursday 25 May 2023

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 11.40 am General Questions
 12.00 pm First Minister's Questions
followed by Members' Business
 2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Net Zero and Just Transition
followed by Ministerial Statement: Medium Term Financial Strategy
followed by Rural Affairs and Islands Committee Debate: Future Agriculture Policy in Scotland
followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 30 May 2023

2.00 pm Time for Reflection
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Topical Questions (if selected)
followed by Scottish Government Business
followed by Committee Announcements
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 31 May 2023

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands; NHS Recovery Health and Social Care
followed by Scottish Government Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Thursday 1 June 2023

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 11.40 am General Questions
 12.00 pm First Minister's Questions
followed by Members' Business
 2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.30 pm Portfolio Questions: Social Justice
followed by Scottish Government Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 22 May 2023, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted.—[George Adam]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-08987, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on timetabling of a bill at stage 2.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Patient Safety Commissioner for Scotland Bill at stage 2 be completed by 30 June 2023.—[George Adam]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:28

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of 10 Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask George Adam to move motions S6M-09004, on Committee of the Regions membership, S6M-09005 to S6M-09009, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments, S6M-09010 to S6M-09012, on designation of lead committees, and S6M-09013 on committee membership.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees to appoint Alasdair Allan as a full member and Neil Bibby as an alternate member of the Committee of the Regions UK Contact Group and to nominate Ben Macpherson as a full member and Maurice Golden as an alternate member of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.

That the Parliament agrees that the Environmental Standards Scotland air quality investigation - Scottish Government improvement plan (SG/2023/75) be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Fireworks and Pyrotechnic Articles (Scotland) Act 2022 (Consequential Modifications, Saving and Transitional Provisions) Regulations 2023 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the National Smart Ticketing Advisory Board (Gender Representation on Public Boards) (Scotland) Regulations 2023 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the First-tier Tribunal for Scotland (Allocation of Functions to the General Regulatory Chamber) Regulations 2023 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the First-tier Tribunal for Scotland General Regulatory Chamber and Upper Tribunal for Scotland (Composition and Rules of Procedure) (Miscellaneous Amendment) Regulations 2023 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Economy and Fair Work Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Bankruptcy and Diligence (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

That the Parliament agrees that the Criminal Justice Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the legislative consent memorandum in relation to the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill (UK Legislation).

That the Parliament agrees that the Criminal Justice Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

That the Parliament agrees that Keith Brown be appointed to replace Kenneth Gibson as a member of the Finance and Public Administration Committee.—[George Adam]

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

The next item of business is a motion on approval of an SSI. I ask Shirley-Anne Somerville to speak to and move motion S6M-08907.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament recommends that the Social Security (Residence Requirements) (Sudan) (Scotland) Regulations 2023 [draft] be approved.—[*Shirley-Anne Somerville*]

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

Decision Time

17:28

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): There are nine questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S6M-08954.3, in the name of Kevin Stewart, which seeks to amend motion S6M-08954, in the name of Alex Rowley, on access to bus services, 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.

17:29

Meeting suspended.

17:31

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that amendment S6M-08954.3, in the name of Kevin Stewart, be agreed to. Members should cast their votes now.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (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)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (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)
 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)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-08954.3, in the name of Kevin Stewart, is: For 63, Against 53, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that amendment S6M-08954.2, in the name of Graham Simpson, on access to bus services, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (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)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (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)
 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)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-08954.2, in the name of Graham Simpson, is: For 53, Against 64, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-08954, in the name of Alex Rowley, on access to bus services, as amended, 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)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (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)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (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)
 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)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)

Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-08954, in the name of Alex Rowley, on access to bus services, as amended, is: For 64, Against 52, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament believes that reliable, accessible and affordable public transport is a key lifeline service in Scotland; believes that public investment in passenger transport should deliver value for money, environmental and social benefits; supports the vision outlined in the policy prospectus, Equality, Opportunity, Community, for a public transport system that is more accessible, available and affordable; notes the success of the concessionary bus travel schemes, which now offer free bus travel to 2.6 million people, with over two thirds of young people under 22 now holding the National Entitlement Card, making over 62 million journeys to date; agrees that bus services should serve the needs of local communities; notes the introduction of provisions under the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019, which will empower local authorities with the flexible tools that they need to respond to their own transport challenges, coupled with funding that allows local authorities to develop new ways of supporting bus development; recognises the key role of bus services in decarbonising transport and therefore welcomes the recent second tranche of zero emissions bus funding, and commends all of the staff involved in sustaining bus services over the last three years.

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that amendment S6M-08955.3, in the name of Maree Todd, which seeks to amend motion S6M-08955, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on tackling Scotland's mental health crisis, 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)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (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)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (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)
 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)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire)

(Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-08955.3, in the name of Maree Todd, is: For 64, Against 53, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-08955.1, in the name of Sue Webber, which seeks to amend motion S6M-08955, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on tackling Scotland's mental health crisis, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)

Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (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)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (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)
 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)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-08955.1, in the name of Sue Webber, is: For 53, Against 64, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-08955, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on tackling Scotland’s mental health crisis, as amended, 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)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (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)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (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)
 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)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 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)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)

Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-08955, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on tackling Scotland's mental health crisis, as amended, is: For 64, Against 53, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament acknowledges Mental Health Awareness Week; understands that many people are struggling with their mental health and wellbeing, so welcomes this debate as an important opportunity to talk openly about issues such as anxiety; recognises the cumulative impact that the COVID-19 pandemic, the conflict in Ukraine, Brexit and the cost of living crisis have had on the mental wellbeing of children, young people and adults across the country; welcomes the fact that mental health spending has doubled in cash terms from £651 million in 2006-07 to £1.3 billion in 2021-22, and that, as a result of that investment, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and psychological therapies staffing has more than doubled; acknowledges that the Scottish Government has exceeded its commitment to fund over 800 additional mental health workers in settings such as A&E departments, GP practices, police custody suites and prisons; notes the aims to increase mental health staffing further, but recognises that supporting wider community resilience is as important as enhancing NHS capacity; welcomes, therefore, the fact that, between July and December 2022, more than 45,000 children, young people and their family members across Scotland accessed community-based mental health support; acknowledges the benefit of the 3,300 grants provided to grassroots community organisations through the Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund for adults in the past two years, with a further £15 million of investment confirmed for 2023-24; notes that, since its launch in 2017, the Distress Brief Intervention programme has provided support to over 40,000 people; recognises that every death lost to suicide is an enormous tragedy, which leaves devastating and long-lasting impacts on families, friends and communities; supports the aims of the work being driven forward by a wide range of partners as a result of the Scottish Government and COSLA's Suicide Prevention Strategy and

Action Plan, published in 2022, and believes that these efforts will be enhanced by the publication in June 2023 of a new Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy, which will focus on further action required to support mental health and wellbeing.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-08946, in the name of Martin Whitfield, on the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's 10th report in 2023, session 6, 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)
 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)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)

Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 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)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)

Abstentions

Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-08946, in the name of Martin Whitfield, on the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's 10th report in 2023, session 6, is: For 99, Against 11, Abstentions 1.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament notes the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's 10th Report, 2023 (Session 6), Complaint against Maggie Chapman MSP (SP Paper 366), and agrees to impose the sanction recommended in the report that Maggie Chapman MSP be excluded from the first meeting of the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee that is held after this motion is agreed.

The Presiding Officer: I propose to ask a single question on 10 Parliamentary Bureau motions, in the name of George Adam. As no member has objected, the question is, that motion S6M-09004, on Committee of the Regions membership, motions S6M-09005 to S6M-09009, on the approval of Scottish statutory instruments, motions S6M-09010 to S6M-09012, on the designation of lead committees, and motion S6M-09013, on committee membership, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees to appoint Alasdair Allan as a full member and Neil Bibby as an alternate member of the Committee of the Regions UK Contact Group and to nominate Ben Macpherson as a full member and Maurice Golden as an alternate member of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.

That the Parliament agrees that the Environmental Standards Scotland air quality investigation - Scottish Government improvement plan (SG/2023/75) be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Fireworks and Pyrotechnic Articles (Scotland) Act 2022 (Consequential Modifications, Saving and Transitional Provisions) Regulations 2023 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the National Smart Ticketing Advisory Board (Gender Representation on Public Boards) (Scotland) Regulations 2023 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the First-tier Tribunal for Scotland (Allocation of Functions to the General Regulatory Chamber) Regulations 2023 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the First-tier Tribunal for Scotland General Regulatory Chamber and Upper Tribunal for Scotland (Composition and Rules of Procedure) (Miscellaneous Amendment) Regulations 2023 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Economy and Fair Work Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Bankruptcy and Diligence (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

That the Parliament agrees that the Criminal Justice Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the legislative consent memorandum in relation to the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill (UK Legislation).

That the Parliament agrees that the Criminal Justice Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

That the Parliament agrees that Keith Brown be appointed to replace Kenneth Gibson as a member of the Finance and Public Administration Committee.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S6M-08907, in the name of Shirley-Anne Somerville, on approval of an SSI, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament recommends that the Social Security (Residence Requirements) (Sudan) (Scotland) Regulations 2023 [draft] be approved.

Lyme Disease

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-07769, in the name of Evelyn Tweed, on national Lyme disease awareness month. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament acknowledges that May 2023 is National Lyme Disease Awareness Month; notes that Lyme disease is a bacterial infection spread to humans by infected ticks, which are tiny spider-like creatures found in woodland and moorland areas that feed on the blood of birds and mammals, including humans; understands that many people with early symptoms of Lyme disease develop a circular rash around the tick bite three to 30 days after being bitten, often described as looking like a bull's eye on a dart board, whilst some people may develop several rashes in different parts of their body, and around one in three people will not develop a rash; further understands that some people with Lyme disease also have flu-like symptoms, including tiredness, muscle and joint pain, headaches, a high temperature, chills and neck stiffness; notes the calls encouraging anyone who has been bitten by a tick and develops a rash or flu-like symptoms to speak to their GP and tell them that they have been bitten by a tick; further notes, however, that diagnosing Lyme disease is often difficult as many of the symptoms are similar to other conditions; acknowledges that NHS Scotland advises that Lyme disease is treatable, however, that without treatment, more serious and longer-term symptoms may develop, including pain and swelling in joints, nerve problems, memory problems, difficulty concentrating and heart problems; understands that there is currently no vaccine available and that the best way to prevent Lyme disease is to adopt simple measures when in the countryside or near wildlife, including tucking trousers into socks and wearing insect repellent, and notes the calls encouraging anybody who is concerned that they have contracted Lyme disease to contact their GP and for everyone to take precautions when in the countryside.

17:47

Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP): I am very happy to speak in the chamber in Lyme disease awareness month. This is a very personal debate for me, as I first became aware of Lyme disease through my good friend Pauline Bowie, who I have known since our university days. Pauline is now an ambassador for the Lyme Resource Centre, and she is in the gallery tonight with fellow Lyme disease sufferers, colleagues and young people from St Peter the Apostle high school in Clydebank. I warmly welcome them to our Scottish Parliament.

Working at a summer camp in 1989, Pauline noticed a small circular rash on her thigh. She was told by the director that it was probably ringworm. Over the next few years, she suffered a range of debilitating symptoms, from flu-like symptoms to inflamed joints, nausea, insomnia and dizziness. She had breathing difficulties and heart

palpitations, and she was diagnosed with anxiety and hyperventilation. She was told how to use a paper bag to breathe into. She was unable to do many of the things that she loved, but she could not get answers from doctors.

Years passed and her symptoms worsened. By the mid-2000s, she had extreme joint pain. In 2017, she suffered two incidents of pain so extreme that she was hospitalised with a suspected heart attack. Dizziness, speech slurring, blurred vision and brain fog were all put down to anxiety, and tests were inconclusive. Thirty years later, after hearing that her cousin was ill with Lyme disease, Pauline googled it and was very shocked to find that she was a textbook case.

Lyme disease is caused by a bacteria called Lyme borreliosis, which can be passed on to humans by infected ticks. Ticks infected with Lyme disease are found all over the United Kingdom. There are ticks anywhere that there are pets, wild mammals and birds—in woodland, in open countryside and even in urban parks and gardens. Removing ticks quickly helps to prevent infection, but removing them incorrectly can actually increase the infection risk.

Many people with early symptoms develop a circular red skin rash around the tick bite, which is often described as looking like a bull's-eye on a dartboard. Lyme disease can also cause flu-like symptoms, fever, fatigue and migratory joint or muscle aches and pains.

There are conflicting opinions on how best to treat Lyme disease, but it is most often treated through a course or courses of antibiotics. Lyme disease can often be treated effectively if it is detected early on, but if it is not treated early or treatment is delayed, there is a risk of developing severe and long-lasting symptoms, such as Pauline's.

For people without the red rash, laboratory tests are used to diagnose Lyme disease. However, the tests are not sensitive and cannot tell the difference between current and past infections. There are enormous challenges in diagnosing Lyme disease. Many people do not notice that they have been bitten by a tick. It is easily missed given that some bites are as small as a poppy seed. Often, when symptoms appear, people do not associate them with ticks.

That is what happened to Lesley Paterson, world champion triathlete and Oscar-winning screenwriter, who is from my constituency. Lyme disease took her out for a year. Even now, it still impacts her, and like many others, she has no idea where or when she was infected.

What we see as the classic indicator of Lyme disease—the bull's-eye rash—often does not look

like a bull's-eye. It can appear in different shapes and have different presentations on darker skins, and it does not appear at all in about a third of cases.

Lyme disease's wide-ranging symptoms can look like any number of other conditions, resulting in the disease being called "the great pretender". Symptoms that later turn out to be caused by Lyme disease are misdiagnosed as other conditions, such as anxiety or chronic fatigue.

Patients have been dismissed and told that the symptoms are in their heads. When Pauline told her doctor that she thought that she might have Lyme disease, she was told that she was jumping on a fad. Inevitably, that lack of awareness among general practitioners has a detrimental effect along existing lines of inequality. Those who are already marginalised—women, disabled people and people of colour—are less likely to get a diagnosis and timely treatment.

Lyme Disease Action developed an online training course in collaboration with the Royal College of General Practitioners, covering how to identify and treat the disease. However, the charity Lyme Disease UK notes that only a very small percentage of GPs have taken the course.

Tick bites are often associated with recreational activities, such as hillwalking, and working in sectors such as forestry and farming. However, more evidence is being found of the risk of tick bites being much closer to home. The big tick project found that one third of dogs that were checked in its study had ticks attached to them. Pet owners are at risk as ticks can drop off in the home or transfer, but 47 per cent of owners were not aware that they, too, are at risk of infection from tick-borne diseases.

The *British Medical Journal* has called for more national and international debates on Lyme disease, which I am glad we are contributing to today. It has also called for a solid research agenda, as well as robust public awareness campaigns. Indeed, Dr Lucy Gilbert, a senior research fellow from the University of Glasgow, has noted the need for more research into tick populations and Lyme disease in urban areas. However, funding remains a challenge.

There is huge appetite for change in this area, from committed and well-informed organisations such as the Lyme Resource Centre that are leading awareness campaigns, to a start-up in the Highlands that is developing an app to map the risk of Lyme disease. As well as awareness raising, action such as bracken control can help to mitigate risks.

The issues here are multisectoral and overlap with healthcare, education, forestry and land

management, and academia. To take successful action—

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

Evelyn Tweed: Yes, I will take an intervention.

Rachael Hamilton: From what Evelyn Tweed is saying, deer are a key host of ticks. Therefore, it is important that we support our rural workforce to ensure that we have individuals who are able to effectively manage deer populations to stop the spread of Lyme disease.

Evelyn Tweed: Anything that we can do in looking at the tick population and Lyme disease needs to be considered.

I will go back to the part of my speech that I was just finishing off. The issues here are multisectoral and overlap with healthcare, education, forestry and land management, and academia. To take successful action, a collaborative approach is required.

I look forward to hearing everyone's contributions to the debate and what steps the Scottish Government will take to engage stakeholders and tackle the issues surrounding this complex disease.

17:56

Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): I congratulate my colleague Evelyn Tweed on securing this important debate and on her thoughtful and knowledgeable opening speech.

I am pleased to be able to speak in tonight's debate on raising awareness of Lyme disease. It can be devastating to people, and it is vital that everyone knows how to prevent its transmission. I am a committed campaigner on the issue, and the debate is very welcome as a useful vehicle to get the message out.

In Scotland, there has been a significant increase in the number of cases of Lyme disease that are reported each year. Lyme disease is an increasing problem, and as we enter the warmer summer months, it is vital that, alongside our healthcare partners, we do all that we can to ensure that our constituents are properly informed about its danger.

One of the few benefits that came out of the Covid-19 pandemic was that many people took the time to explore everything that Scotland has to offer. They spent time walking, hiking and enjoying our beautiful outdoor spaces. We are so fortunate to have such fantastic countryside on our doorstep, but with that renewed desire to explore those areas, there has been a sharp rise in the

number of people being bitten by ticks, the main driver of Lyme disease in Scotland.

Recent research found that almost two thirds of people in Scotland have been bitten by or know someone who has been bitten by a tick. More concerning than that, however, is that the same research found that more than half of people in Scotland do not know what to do when bitten by a tick. Those are extremely concerning figures, which show just how much work we still need to do.

I am pleased to repeat the experience of my constituent Pauline, who joins us here today in the public gallery alongside pupils from St Peter the Apostle high school in Clydebank. Pauline is keen to raise awareness of the disease's impact and share her story. As Pauline's MSP, I am happy to do so and ensure that the voices of my constituents are heard in our Parliament.

After Pauline was bitten by a tick more than 30 years ago, she experienced flu-like symptoms and an expanding bull's-eye rash. She was misdiagnosed numerous times, and it was not until 2018 that, after seeing a range of specialists, she was finally diagnosed with Lyme disease. Unfortunately, she spent decades facing a wide range of debilitating symptoms before getting the treatment that she needed. It was an absolutely horrific experience for Pauline, and we must do everything that we can to ensure that situations like that do not happen again.

I was also struck by the case of Rico Franchi, which was publicised by the national health service. Rico is a 40-year-old father of three who has lived with Lyme disease for more than 12 years. He went from being a super-fit gym goer to being completely floored. His lifestyle was significantly disrupted. If it can happen to Rico, it can happen to any of us.

There is no cure for Lyme disease, so we must do three things. We must educate people about prevention, improve our testing capacities and ensure that patients with Lyme disease get the treatment and support that they need. With the warmer summer months just around the corner, it is important that we prioritise the first of those actions, which involves educating people about how to deal with tick bites.

People should always check for ticks after spending time in green spaces, carefully remove any ticks as soon as possible, make sure that their socks are tucked into their trousers when they are in green spaces and see their GP urgently if they develop a red circular rash and flu-like symptoms.

We want to ensure that people enjoy their time in Scotland's beautiful outdoors, but we also want to ensure that they do so safely, so that they do

not have to go through what Pauline, Rico and many others have had to endure.

18:00

Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con): I thank Evelyn Tweed for securing this important debate recognising national Lyme disease awareness month.

Since I was elected in 2016, I have been involved with the campaign to improve awareness, diagnosis and treatment of Lyme disease, meeting with petitioners, professors, doctors and groups such as Tick-borne Illness Campaign Scotland to try to make progress on improving materials and education on the disease.

Sadly, as we have heard, many sufferers of Lyme disease are misdiagnosed due to the lack of knowledge surrounding the disease, which can have long-lasting and debilitating effects. Although we encourage people to enjoy the outdoors and explore our beautiful countryside, thousands of new cases are detected every year across the United Kingdom, so we need to educate medical staff to ensure that they recognise the disease. We know that early diagnosis and treatment of Lyme disease is vital. If that does not happen, patients risk developing devastating symptoms. As we have heard, early signs can include the bull's-eye rash, flu-like symptoms and fatigue. If untreated, the condition can develop into joint pain and swelling, nerve problems, heart problems and chronic fatigue syndrome.

It is very troubling to hear of the appearance in the UK of the new tick-borne encephalitis virus, which reportedly can be fatal, and I hope that the Scottish Government engages with a UK-wide approach to improve detection of that.

The issue that we are discussing is not just a rural one, as budget cuts to councils have resulted in less grass cutting in urban parks—it is often dressed up as conservation, but it actually just creates a breeding ground for ticks and more infections.

Although advice such as rolling up our socks might seem sound, it is akin to the former First Minister telling schools to chop the bottom off doors during the pandemic. It is a poor substitute for improving resources and public awareness campaigns from the Scottish Government.

We need to ensure that all avenues of raising awareness are used, so I was very interested in LymeApp, a service that was piloted in the Highlands a few years ago. However, I have heard no more about progress on that or when it will be extended across Scotland. I hope that the minister can update us on that tonight.

I am also delighted that the first-ever conference on tick-borne diseases will be held in Inverness later this month.

Over the past few years, I have raised numerous questions in Parliament to find out what action is happening. The Scottish Government recently confirmed that it will continue using its own platforms to highlight the risk and symptoms of Lyme disease. However, three years ago, when I asked how much traffic those webpages obtained, I noted that the results were poor. The Scottish Government's page on avoiding bugs and germs outdoors, which also contains information relating to Lyme disease, had a little more than 12,000 views in the three years to 2020. I would be interested to hear the updated figures for that and other sites.

Further, I note that, in a world with social media at our finger tips, neither the Scottish Government account or the office of the chief executive of NHS Scotland account has tweeted about Lyme disease since last year, and the NHS National Services Scotland account has not tweeted about ticks or Lyme disease since 2020. Not one of those accounts—or other relevant accounts such as those of Public Health Scotland and NatureScot—has tweeted in support of Lyme disease awareness month. Can the minister tell me where the public campaigns that the Scottish National Party Government promises are?

Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP): I am not sure whether the member has not seen it, but I noticed a Scottish Government awareness campaign about ticks yesterday.

Alexander Burnett: I am very glad for the member, but I do not think that that reduces the point that there are numerous sites within the control of the Scottish Government that should be pushing awareness of Lyme disease and are clearly failing to do so.

I repeat my question to the minister: where is the information being spread to warn as many people as possible of the risks of ticks, and what commitments will the Scottish Government make to improving awareness, testing and treatment of Lyme disease?

Finally, who exactly sits on the Scottish Government-led Lyme disease awareness-raising group, and what action has it taken this month? I ask that because, after seven years of being involved in this subject, the silence is deafening.

18:05

Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP): I thank my colleague Evelyn Tweed for securing this vital debate on Lyme disease

awareness month. My speech will be based around cause and effect.

Lyme disease is spread by ticks, so the effect of not controlling ticks and their habitat is more Lyme disease. I used to marvel at the skill and stockmanship of the people I used to refer to as the high hill folk, who farmed cattle and sheep on the hills over thousands of acres with wild-bred sheep and dogs to match. Ticks were of huge concern to them, which was why the old sheep-dip pens would be a hive of activity at least twice a year as neighbours rallied around to get the hill ewes dipped. The spring rise before dipping could see literally hundreds of ticks hanging from pregnant sheep, causing anaemia and poor thrive or sheep-killing diseases such as louping ill virus and tick-borne fever in young stock. In areas of high infection, louping ill could kill anywhere between 5 per cent and 10 per cent of young stock in any given year.

The need for hill-bred sheep to be bound to the ground is in large part due to the ability of the sheep to deal with tick-borne infections as a result of the genetic make-up of generations of sheep that have been bred on the same ground over many decades—if new sheep are brought on to that ground, losses due to tick-borne fever or louping ill can be as high as 60 per cent of infected animals. It is for those reasons that chemical preventions such as the old-fashioned—and now no longer used—organophosphate dips were created. They were highly effective at killing ticks and scab mites on sheep, and I can remember quite vividly the clean smell, as well as the lift in the health condition and vitality of freshly dipped sheep. However, those dips were not without side effects, particularly for humans, and were replaced by the synthetic pyrethroid dips, which were good for controlling scab mites but not ticks. That led to the invention and evolution of the pour-on insecticides that are now used and that are extremely effective at killing huge numbers of ticks, which, in turn, makes it easier for humans and dogs to avoid being bitten.

Presiding Officer, the reason for me asking for this indulgence in describing hill farming and its history of controlling tick infestations is that, over the past 20 to 30 years, literally hundreds of thousands of hill sheep have been taken off the hills as farmers have found it harder and harder to be profitable. What that has meant is that the tick has been allowed to thrive unchecked over the huge swathes of Scotland from which the sheep have gone. For a number of years, grouse moor managers bought hundreds of male castrate sheep—called wethers—and ran them over the hills as tick mops to try to control tick numbers. Those wether sheep would be treated with chemical pour-on and released to the hill. As they swept over the ground, they would mop up huge

numbers of ticks that would, in turn, be killed by the insecticide on the sheep.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): I agree with the measures that are taken to reduce the load of ticks in the environment and, therefore, reduce the impact on humans. Does the member agree that bracken control is absolutely vital in reducing tick load in the countryside and that, right now, there is only one chemical herbicide—Asulox—that can do that effectively? We are waiting for an emergency authorisation to use that; NatureScot has called for that provision to come into force. Does the member agree that we need a year-on-year licence to allow that chemical product to be used, rather than the annual circus where we see farmers and sprayers having to argue their point each year?

Jim Fairlie: Patience is a virtue—I am coming to that issue.

Treating sheep for ticks has helped ground-nesting birds, other wildlife, grouse moor managers and sheep and cattle farmers; a by-product of that intervention is that it has helped the folk we tell to get out and enjoy the countryside—the ramblers, walkers, hikers and campers who take to the hills in their thousands every weekend—by cutting down the sheer number of ticks that can infect people, mammals and birds alike.

One of the interventions that we can use, among others, is habitat control, and that brings me on to the subject that is high on the agenda right now: bracken control. As we know, bracken is a noxious weed that grows in abundance on our hills, reaching up to five or six feet tall, blanketing literally thousands of acres of hill ground and ensuring that nothing else can grow.

That creates virtual deserts of bracken that are, importantly, a harbinger of huge numbers of ticks. The height of the bracken means that the ticks waiting for a host to feed on can be at shoulder or even head height to a human. My colleague Fergus Ewing will talk more about this, but bracken control is difficult, especially on hill ground, which is often too steep and dangerous for mechanical interventions.

I urge the Scottish Government to please issue with maximum urgency the licences that are needed for aerial bracken control using asulam. For the avoidance of doubt, no one uses Asulox unless it is an absolute last resort, not least because of the cost. There has been no new science this year that is any different from that of last year. I very much hope that the decision to issue the licences is imminent.

18:10

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank Evelyn Tweed for bringing this interesting debate to the chamber. I am not putting myself forward as an expert in tonight's debate and I have tried really hard to listen to all contributions by the members and will endeavour to go back and speak to the Labour group because this seems to be an important issue and we need to push to get it right for people. I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in the debate on behalf of Scottish Labour, and to make that commitment.

Like many members, I represent a rural region, South Scotland, which has so much beautiful woodland and outdoor space so, even before tonight's debate, I recognised the issues around ticks and the associated bacterial infection of Lyme disease. We know that the symptoms might not be easily recognised and diagnosed, which means that they can be missed, as Evelyn Tweed said, so I hope that highlighting the issue will ensure that there is better awareness among the population thus reducing the risk of infection. Raising awareness will also help to support NHS staff and the healthcare workforce to recognise the signs and symptoms, which will result in appropriate diagnosis of the condition.

As we have heard, Lyme disease is a bacterial infection that is spread to humans by infected ticks. Many of us who have dogs who enjoy long woodland walks recognise ticks as tiny spider-like creatures that are found in woodland and heath, although they can be found in any area of deep or overgrown vegetation where animals feed. Although reported to be more prevalent in the Highlands of Scotland, we are not just talking about rural areas: woodlands and dense vegetation in urban parks see plenty of wildlife, including the spider-like tick. Members have brought out very well that we are now seeing them in other areas where humans walk.

Ticks feed on the blood of birds and mammals, including humans, and that is, of course, where the problem lies. Ticks bite and those bites could infect us with Lyme disease. A tick bite can only cause Lyme disease in humans if the tick has already bitten an infected animal. Some of the research that I looked at talked about the different ways in which farmers manage their animals nowadays.

Members have mentioned the important information that is needed to recognise the signs and symptoms of tick bites and when people should seek medical advice. I appreciate that there are other matters that I did not go over when researching my speech, around the management of farmlands and the beautiful countryside around us, that are also relevant.

A couple of things struck me as being important to raise with the public and the minister, the first of which is that ticks will bite and feed on people's dogs and cats, which is relevant in urban areas. They can be on the dog or cat for a few days before dropping off and they can pass diseases, including Lyme disease, on to the pet. During my research for tonight's debate, I noticed information about the signs and symptoms in dogs and cats, and I believe that the pet-loving Scottish public would wish to know some of them, especially as they are also relevant in the prevention of tick transfer to humans.

My second point is about workplace safety, which Rachael Hamilton raised. Scottish Woodlands has Lyme Disease UK as its charity this year because it is aware that its staff could be affected by Lyme disease and it is keen to see further research into Lyme disease.

In the interests of time, I will move on. In my speech, I had planned to talk about some things that other members have talked about—the sensible things that people can do—but it is really important that the minister feeds back to us on the fact that we need to raise public awareness of the reasonable and easy things that people can do and how we manage the issue in the countryside. I thank the Presiding Officer and all the members who spoke tonight.

18:15

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): It has been a few years since I have had the opportunity to take part in a debate on Lyme disease, which is an important but often under-recognised issue. Therefore, I warmly congratulate Evelyn Tweed and thank her for providing this opportunity. I also extend my welcome to those in the gallery who join us this evening, and I thank those who have provided briefings for this evening's debate.

I first came into contact with the issue of Lyme disease when I was a member of the then Rural Affairs and Environment Committee, back in the 2007-11 session of Parliament. We have come a bit of a distance since then and it would not be fair to say that there has been no progress. I noticed that the Scottish Land & Estates briefing acknowledges that medical awareness of Lyme disease is better than it was. Is it as good as it needs to be? Possibly not—there is variability in awareness—but a bit of progress certainly seems to have been made.

Nevertheless, as Evelyn Tweed and others have identified, we are looking at an increased incidence of tick-borne Lyme disease, as a result of many different factors. Jim Fairlie referred to the change in farming practices. The extension of forestation now and going forward is likely to play

a part as well. However, some of the issues around climate change are also having an effect by increasing the number of ticks and, therefore, heightening the risk of infection. We are also seeing high numbers of people being diagnosed, but it is accepted there is still underreporting of cases and, certainly, continued missed diagnoses and underdiagnosis.

All that speaks to the need to redouble efforts, raise awareness and improve diagnosis and the treatments that are available. Evelyn Tweed is right to point to the fact that there is no magic bullet in that respect, but early diagnosis and early treatment certainly improve people's outcomes. Clearly, there are people who are at risk, such as farmers, foresters, land managers and those who access the countryside, such as hikers and ramblers.

However, Evelyn Tweed, Carol Mochan and others made the point that we also need to deal with the risks to those who do not necessarily fall into that category, such as dog owners—I say that as the owner of a springer spaniel who spends far too much time sticking his head where it should not be and picks up ticks regularly. Raising awareness among groups that perhaps do not really see Lyme disease as an issue for them will be a focus of attention going forward.

Jim Fairlie was also right to say that, yes, there is a human risk but that the risk to livestock, particularly from louping ill, should not be underestimated either. Therefore, I join others in underscoring the need for increased research—and for bracken control, for which there is no magic bullet. However, there is no doubt that a more sensible approach to the licensing of asulam would help and make a huge difference.

Continued efforts in the area of awareness raising are also needed. That will need to be done carefully, because we do not want to spread fear and alarm or discourage the public from accessing the countryside responsibly. We do not want to overload laboratories with testing that is not necessarily of benefit. However, we need to acknowledge that there is a heightened risk that needs to be addressed. That awareness-raising campaign, as Alexander Burnett pointed out, will need to be ramped up and extended and become a bit more sophisticated in the social media age, to communicate the very important message that Evelyn Tweed has allowed the Parliament to reinforce this evening.

18:19

Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP): I warmly congratulate Evelyn Tweed on bringing this debate to the Parliament and for her very moving account of the horrific impacts that the

disease has had on her constituents who are here this evening.

Because of such impacts it is vital that we take all steps to prevent people from being in the position of likely exposure to infection with Lyme disease.

As other members have said, bracken habitat is by far the most important reservoir habitat for ticks and tick-borne disease. Professor Roy Brown, who is a lifelong expert on bracken and ticks, has highlighted that because there is far more bracken—it has increased exponentially—there are far more ticks. A far higher proportion of the ticks—especially, I understand, adult females—are infective and carry various diseases, of which Lyme disease is perhaps the best known. Louping ill, which Liam McArthur mentioned, is another. Ticks are also related to other forms of ill health.

At the moment, the only way to tackle the problem effectively is through use of asulam, in the form of Asulox. Scottish Land & Estates has confirmed that in its representations to us for this evening's debate. Unfortunately, Asulox is the subject of a process of annual emergency authorisation. Frankly, it should be used automatically—the science now is the same as it was last year—but the laborious emergency authorisation process has to be undergone. The four Administrations in the UK must issue approvals to the Health and Safety Executive, which has delegated responsibility for giving advice to the four Administrations. As a process, that is fine, but it is too slow.

I was in correspondence with the HSE on the matter last year and have been in correspondence with it again this year. Just before the debate, I was informed that it has not yet taken a decision. No one wants to get into the blame game, but it is apparent that the delay, regardless of why it has occurred, is now very serious. That is especially the case because manufacture of the drug has, as it happens, been shifted to India, so there could be a further delay of six weeks before it can be procured. In addition, the drug needs to be applied in a season that finishes in August and September. The window is very short indeed: we are in the last week before authorisation can be given and be effective. Therefore, we really need a substantive response from the HSE. I would be grateful to the minister, who I know is very knowledgeable about Asulox—before her elevation to ministerial position, she worked alongside Mr Fairlie, me and others on the issue—if she would advance the arguments that I am making this evening.

When I raised the issue with the First Minister at First Minister's question time last week, he said that uncontrolled bracken represents a serious threat that needs to be dealt with. In his response,

he said that the HSE had made a recommendation and that the Scottish Government had “considered and ... responded” to that recommendation, but he did not say what that response was. Being an inquisitive kind of guy, as members might know, I would like to know whether the minister can share with us—we are all coming from the same angle; we want to get this sorted—what that response was. I believe that Minister Slater is the minister who is responsible. Did she say yes or not? What was the response? We need to be clear that Scotland has played its part in getting a yes.

There has been some suggestion from the UK Government that another treatment called amidosulfuron—Squire Ultra is its commercial name—is being considered. I make it clear that that treatment is not effective. The clear advice is that it will not work, so if the UK Government is considering using it, it should think again.

Liam McArthur is right: we do not want to set hares running. On one hand, we do not want to cause alarm among people who want to enjoy the countryside, but on the other hand we owe it to our population to take all practical and sensible steps to avoid more people—people who work in rural Scotland, as members across the chamber have highlighted—getting that ghastly disease. It would be catastrophic if a cumbersome and unnecessarily complicated process of approval were to become the enemy of achieving the purpose of that very process, which is designed to protect the public against the risk of contracting a disease that, as Evelyn Tweed said, is extremely serious, albeit that it is not sufficiently well understood or appreciated in society as a whole.

18:24

The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto): I join other members in the chamber in thanking Evelyn Tweed for lodging the motion for debate in the chamber during Lyme disease awareness month. I welcome Pauline Bowie and others to the gallery and hope that their recovery continues. I am pleased to have the opportunity to close the debate and to highlight the importance of raising awareness of Lyme disease.

Although we know that the majority of cases of Lyme disease can be treated with antibiotics, for some people it can have a serious impact on their daily lives.

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): Will the minister take an intervention?

Jenni Minto: I am only 30 seconds into my speech. I am sorry.

My first encounter with a tick was almost 50 years ago, when I spotted an odd growth on my spaniel's head. Thankfully, a friend knew what it

was and quickly whipped it out with tweezers. At that point it was just an ugly beastie, but now I know so much more about the impact that ticks can have on our health and about the importance of removing them safely. I appreciate the contributions that members have made in the debate. Now, after every walk, I check my collie, Jim, for ticks, as well as ensuring that I am tick free, too.

I will touch on some members' contributions to the debate. First, I will take Douglas Lumsden's intervention.

Douglas Lumsden: I have been contacted by a constituent—Emily Gilmour, from Inverurie—who, with her son, has Lyme disease. So far, she has spent £40,000 on private treatment abroad. Will the minister look into her case and see whether she can get the treatment that she requires in Scotland?

Jenni Minto: I cannot comment specifically on individual cases, but I would be happy to look into that further. The personal stories that Evelyn Tweed and Marie McNair spoke about are so important and emphasise the need for increasing awareness and ensuring that a co-ordinated approach to Lyme disease is taken. Marie McNair spoke about educating, testing and supporting the right treatment. Alexander Burnett commented on the awareness campaign. I had a wee look: the Scottish Government tweeted five days ago about Lyme disease and we have posted about it on Facebook and Instagram. We will have a wider campaign.

Alexander Burnett: Jim Fairlie mentioned that the Scottish Government had tweeted about Lyme disease, which I accept. However, if I am not mistaken, none of the health social media accounts have tweeted or posted about it. Could the minister comment on that, as the matter is in her portfolio?

Jenni Minto: This debate is important and the Minister for Public Health and Women's Health account will tweet about it, which I will retweet. I hope that Alexander Burnett will join me in retweeting those posts.

Jim Fairlie made a point about sheep being tick magnets, which I have heard from a number of my constituents. Carol Mochan emphasised the importance of having debates such as this in the chamber, and of recognising that ticks are also prevalent in urban areas, in workforces and on our pets, which I have noted. I thank Carol Mochan for recognising that and look forward to hearing about how she speaks about the matter more in the Labour group.

I appreciate Liam McArthur's acknowledgement of the need for careful education and of the importance of awareness among the population,

as well as the importance of proportionate control. I agree that we should not be alarmist.

A number of members mentioned Asulox. As Fergus Ewing pointed out, it does not fall within my portfolio. However, the Scottish Government recognises the concerns about the potential risk of uncontrolled bracken. It is aware of the role that bracken plays in tick populations and the role that Asulox has played in recent years. As the member pointed out, Asulox has no UK or EU authorisation and the HSE is responsible for assessing emergency authorisations. The Scottish Government has, as the First Minister has said, responded to the HSE's recommendation, as will all UK Administrations, and it is the HSE that will respond to the applicant when it is ready to do so. I am afraid that I cannot, at this point, provide a further update.

Finlay Carson: Will the member take an intervention?

Jenni Minto: I have taken a few, Mr Carson, so I will continue. I note the points that Mr Ewing and others have made.

As we have heard, the debate coincides with Lyme disease awareness month, but it is also important because we have seen a rise in cases in Scotland in recent years, as Marie McNair noted. We in Scotland are blessed to have such amazing opportunities to get out and explore our wonderful country, whether we are climbing mountains, walking in woodland or simply enjoying a stroll in park. Although we believe that there is no such thing as bad weather, and that there is just bad clothing, it is true that in spring and summer more people are likely to be enjoying the outdoors. Therefore, provision of information on how to avoid being bitten by a tick, on how to remove an attached tick safely and on the signs and symptoms to be aware of is absolutely key.

We know that prevention is the best defence against Lyme disease. The Scottish Government is committed to raising awareness of Lyme disease and it is currently running a campaign—"Find a tick? Remove it quick."—with posters and information cards in every community pharmacy in Scotland. We want to highlight the key messages of tick avoidance, the signs and symptoms to watch out for and signposting to NHS Inform for further information. I thank the Lyme Disease awareness raising group, whose membership includes representatives from the Lyme Resource Centre, VisitScotland, Ramblers Scotland, and Public Health Scotland, as well as Scottish Government officials from the infectious diseases, early learning and childcare and active Scotland divisions, who co-designed the campaign.

We are planning a follow-up in the summer, with posters in general practices, leisure centres,

libraries and community centres and, we hope, on public transport. That will reinforce key messages for people who have already seen the campaign and will target people who are visiting Scotland from the rest of the UK or abroad.

I appreciate that work needs to be done to raise awareness of Lyme disease among health professionals, to ensure their confidence in diagnosing the condition and in starting patients on antibiotic treatment as soon as possible. If early signs are missed, it is more likely that longer-term symptoms will develop. I absolutely recognise the importance of that, because a member of my family spotted the symptoms and, thankfully, had a very aware GP.

We are making progress in Scotland on testing and diagnosis, and we are working closely with stakeholders and clinicians through the health professionals education sub-group. Following the recent identification in Scotland of a probable case of tick-borne encephalitis, which is a potentially serious infection, clinical surveillance has been increased. Public Health Scotland has requested that the UK Health Security Agency undertake tick capture and testing in Lochearnhead in mid to late June, to assess whether TBE infection can be identified in ticks in Scotland.

It is important to note that one probable case is not evidence of a significant change to the risk to human health in Scotland from TBE. However, the Scottish health protection network tick-borne diseases group, which is a multidisciplinary expert group that is dedicated to Lyme disease, has—rightly, in my view—recently reconvened following the Covid-19 pandemic and officials have requested that surveillance, including for TBE, be included as part of their future work.

In closing, I reiterate that the risk of Lyme disease should not put people off spending time outdoors. There are a few simple steps that people can take to protect themselves. People should cover up bare skin—ideally, wear long trousers and tuck them into socks when in long grass, as has been said, and use insect repellent. They should check themselves and their clothing for ticks after being outside. If a tick is found, people should carefully remove the whole tick using a tick remover or fine tweezers, and speak to their GP if they develop symptoms.

I reiterate my thanks to Evelyn Tweed for bringing the motion to the chamber, and to everyone who has contributed to the debate to raise awareness of Lyme disease.

Meeting closed at 18:34.

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