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Thursday 7 September 2023

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 7 September 2023

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

General Question Time

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Good morning. The first item of business is general question time.

Temporary Accommodation and Social Housing (Edinburgh) (Government Support)

1. Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to support the City of Edinburgh Council and other organisations to provide suitable temporary accommodation and more social housing in Edinburgh. (S6O-02480)

The Minister for Housing (Paul McLennan): We are investing £752 million this year through the affordable housing supply programme to support the delivery of more social and affordable homes, towards our target of 110,000 affordable homes by 2032. We are working with social landlords to make the best use of existing homes, and we are implementing targeted partnership plans with the local authorities that are facing the greatest pressure.

Since 2007, we have supported the delivery of 6,255 social homes in Edinburgh. I have met Edinburgh's housing convener several times to discuss the council's proposals to improve temporary accommodation and increase housing supply, which will inform a partnership plan.

Ben Macpherson: I am grateful for that answer and welcome all of it. However, the minister will be aware of the severity of the situation in Edinburgh. Shelter Scotland has called it an "emergency", and I am increasingly concerned about the correspondence that I am receiving from constituents. The number of homelessness applications has increased by more than 20 per cent. Can the Scottish Government provide any additional help to the City of Edinburgh Council and other relevant organisations for providing more suitable temporary accommodation? Can the Scottish Government do more to fund and prioritise the building and delivery of more social housing in Edinburgh, given the current pressures and projected population growth?

Paul McLennan: Our aim is to prevent homelessness. However, when it occurs, we take a housing-led response in order to provide households with settled homes as quickly as

possible. We provide local authorities with an annual allocation of £8 million of rapid rehousing transition plan funding to support people into settled accommodation, and we provide £30.5 million for their work to prevent homelessness, with the City of Edinburgh Council receiving more than £3.8 million in 2023-24.

During this parliamentary session, to maximise the delivery of social and affordable homes to support strategic housing investment plan priorities, we are making a record £230 million available to the City of Edinburgh Council, with an additional £10 million being allocated this year.

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I agree with Ben Macpherson. In Edinburgh, the number of children who are currently living in temporary accommodation stands at 2,755, which is an increase of 13 per cent on last year. That is almost one third of the total number of children in Scotland who are currently living in temporary accommodation. The situation is escalating out of control. It is time for Scottish National Party and Green ministers to take responsibility and to declare a housing emergency. Will the minister agree urgently to chair a cross-Government temporary-accommodation task force to help to address the situation in the capital?

Paul McLennan: I refer to my previous answer. I have been working closely with the City of Edinburgh Council since being in post, including by looking at the relevant partnership plan, which I mentioned earlier. We have been discussing proposals, and we continue to do so. Miles Briggs will be aware that I attended a housing summit in Edinburgh, which was brought together by Alex Cole-Hamilton. I understand that there will be a further meeting, beyond that. I am happy to meet Miles Briggs to discuss the proposals.

We are looking at opportunities for things that we need to do in Edinburgh, and at how we can bring forward additional social housing in the city. I am happy to discuss that further with Miles Briggs.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): I declare an interest, which is my former work with the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations.

There has been a series of cross-party meetings this year on the urgent issue of Edinburgh's housing crisis. It needs leadership and funding. The gap is £418 million. What will the Scottish Government do now to tackle the scale of homelessness, the lack of affordable housing and—critically, this month—the lack of affordable housing for students?

Paul McLennan: As I have said, we have already attended the housing summit that was brought together by Alex Cole-Hamilton; I understand that a follow-up meeting is planned. As I also said, I have already met Edinburgh's

housing convener on a number of occasions and, at the moment, we are discussing specific proposals. I am happy to discuss that further with Sarah Boyack.

Driving Offences (Alternatives to Prosecution)

2. Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what progress has been made towards the introduction of speed awareness courses, among other diversion schemes for driving offences, as an alternative to prosecution. (S6O-02481)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): The Scottish Government supports the principle of driver education as an alternative to prosecution, where that is appropriate.

The Lord Advocate has agreed in principle to the introduction in Scotland of road traffic diversionary courses, including speed awareness courses. A multi-agency working group that comprises key delivery partners has been set up to oversee the delivery of that initiative.

The Scottish Government continues to discuss with Police Scotland, as the lead partner for delivery, the importance of implementing speed awareness courses, and Police Scotland is currently reviewing the project's timings.

Collette Stevenson: Does the cabinet secretary agree that speed awareness courses are a good way of reaching offenders and challenging their driving behaviour, given that research from down south shows that the people who go on such courses tend to be less likely to reoffend?

Angela Constance: I agree with Collette Stevenson. The Scottish Government agrees that speed awareness courses will have a positive impact on driver behaviour through effective education. The published research on the matter is very important; it shows that such interventions reduce reoffending by people who have attended the courses. They also have a longer-term impact by improving driver behaviour. That is why the Government is working with our key partners to deliver this important road safety initiative to make our roads safer.

Personal Injury Damages (Scottish Law Commission Consultation)

3. Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government when it anticipates it will receive the Scottish Law Commission's findings and recommendations arising from its consultation on damages for personal injury. (S6O-02482)

The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Siobhian Brown): The Scottish Law Commission's "Discussion Paper on Damages for Personal Injury" was published on 23 February 2022, and the consultation period ended on 30 June 2022. The commission is currently in the process of analysing the consultee views that were submitted in response to the discussion paper, and formulating policy with the aim of publishing its findings and its report, which will include an accompanying draft bill, by mid-2024.

Marie McNair: The Scottish Law Commission's recommendations will cover the issue of the time bar on some routes to compensation for people who seek damages for exposure to asbestos. Will the minister make representations to the SLC to request that its report be published as soon as possible? Will she commit to taking early action on the report's recommendations? Finally, will the minister meet me and representatives of the Clydebank Asbestos Group to hear their testimony about how the current injustice is impacting on the group's members?

Siobhian Brown: It is for the Scottish Law Commission to establish a timetable for its work, but I expect the commission to publish its recommendations by mid-2024. The Scottish Government will, of course, give careful consideration to those recommendations, and I will be happy to meet Marie McNair and the Clydebank Asbestos Group to discuss them when we receive them.

Football (Introduction of Strict Liability)

4. John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the potential introduction of strict liability in Scottish football. (S6O-02483)

The Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport (Maree Todd): We have never ruled out strict liability as an option. However, our preferred solution has always been that the footballing authorities in Scotland proactively shape and deliver a robust and meaningful solution to tackle any unacceptable conduct by what is a minority of supporters.

John Mason: In recent times, we have had a huge amount of antisocial behaviour in Glasgow, including in my constituency, by some football fans, particularly around George Square, by Rangers fans, and Glasgow Cross, by Celtic fans. Does the minister agree that the clubs need to take more responsibility, as they do when there is a European championship?

Maree Todd: Although the vast majority of football supporters are well behaved, it is clear that a problem remains, which everyone who is able to exert an influence or to bring about change

must work together to eradicate. It is important that we do not lose sight of the need for collective action to achieve a zero-tolerance approach to any offences or antisocial behaviour. That includes the footballing authorities and the clubs, as well as everyone else.

As I have said, our preferred solution has always been that the footballing authorities in Scotland proactively shape and deliver a robust and meaningful solution to tackle any unacceptable conduct by what is definitely a minority of supporters. However, we have never ruled out strict liability as an option, and we are well aware that clubs are subject to strict liability when they participate in UEFA-run competitions.

We will continue to work with the footballing authorities, Police Scotland and fans' groups to address issues and to ensure that football matches are an enjoyable experience for everyone.

Sexual Harassment in Schools (Elimination)

5. Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government what steps are being taken to eliminate sexual harassment in schools. (S6O-02484)

The Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees (Emma Roddick): The Scottish Government is clear that harassment or abuse in any form, whether in the workplace, at school, at home or in society in general, is completely reprehensible and must stop.

As set out in the 2023-24 programme for government, we are committed to publishing a national framework at the end of this year to better support schools in tackling gender-based violence and sexual harassment. That will help to ensure that consistent messages on sexual harassment and gender-based violence are given to everyone working with children and young people and will support our commitment to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls.

Ross Greer: I welcome the steps that the minister has outlined. The principle of consent is an essential component of effective sex and relationships education, but we know from evidence previously heard in Parliament that many young people receive sex and relationships education without the issue of consent being covered. All children and young people, particularly boys and young men, should receive education on the importance of consent. Does the minister agree that that is essential if we are to tackle so-called "rape culture" and sexual violence, particularly against women and girls, both in schools and in wider society?

Emma Roddick: I absolutely agree with the member. Consent is a critical component of our

commitment to tackling violence against women and girls. Through our relationships, sexual health and parenthood education, our children and young people learn about gender equality, consent and the law, as well as about sexual harassment. Those are key topics in helping children and young people develop their knowledge and understanding of how to have better, healthier relationships.

The Government also published a resource to help professionals support young people aged 11 to 18. "Key Messages for Young People on Healthy Relationships and Consent" sets out that relationships should be mutually respectful, consensual, positive, healthy and enjoyable.

Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): In 2020, the Government conducted a consultation on challenging men's demand for prostitution, working to reduce the harms that are associated with prostitution and helping women to exit prostitution. How has that shaped the Government's approach to ending sexual violence against women and girls?

Emma Roddick: The Scottish Government remains absolutely committed to ending violence against women and girls and we are focused on delivering a framework that effectively tackles and challenges men's demand for prostitution and on seeing that framework operating and tested to the full. That aligns with the equally safe strategy's definition of violence against women and girls. I direct the member to my justice colleagues, who can give any more information that she might require.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): We should, of course, have zero tolerance of sexual harassment, but we should have zero tolerance of all harassment, especially in schools. Why has it taken the cabinet secretary five months to organise the summit on school violence that she said she would hold?

Emma Roddick: Good progress has recently been made on drafting a national framework and the expectation is that the framework will be published early in the new year. The working group that we have set up is currently engaging directly with stakeholders who have key interests in areas that are covered by the framework. I reassure the member that we take the issue absolutely seriously, which is something that we can share.

National Health Service Dentistry

6. Willie Rennie: To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reports that increasing numbers of dentists are leaving the NHS. (S6O-02485)

The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto): The First Minister's policy prospectus sets out the Government's primary objective of sustaining and improving patient access to national health service dental services.

Reform of the payment system is essential to the sustainability of patient access to NHS dental services. In that connection, I wrote to the dental sector on 27 July 2023 to provide details of changes to be introduced on 1 November this year.

Willie Rennie: I am a bit surprised that the minister did not begin with an apology that the Scottish National Party has ditched another manifesto commitment, to abolish NHS dental charges. In fact, charges are not staying static—they are going up. Can the minister tell members how many dentists will join the NHS and do more NHS work as a result of those changes? She knows that NHS dentistry is on its knees.

Jenni Minto: I point out that NHS dentists are working incredibly hard, with many working at pre-pandemic levels. When we made our announcement on 27 July, I was clear that that was the first step towards reforming dental practices, payments and governance and the dental workforce. We are working incredibly hard with NHS boards and dentists to ensure that we understand and can move forward to improve how dentists come into the NHS.

We currently have 183 students going through dental training, and Willie Rennie will remember that we lost 160 as a result of the Covid pandemic, but we aim to try and return more dentists to the sector so that we maintain the incredibly important NHS dental services that support people in Scotland to ensure that they have good oral health.

NHS Fife (Hospital Services)

7. Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to improve hospital services across NHS Fife. (S6O-02486)

The Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care (Michael Matheson): I expect all health boards, including NHS Fife, to keep their services under review to ensure that they are of the highest quality and that they meet the needs of local people while remaining consistent with national policies and frameworks.

Roz McCall: The people of Dunfermline are rightly proud of their new-found city status. The city's population is now one of the fastest growing in the United Kingdom, with another 1,400 homes due for construction.

Unfortunately, the city's health provision at Queen Margaret hospital is not reflected in that. Its chemotherapy unit closed and relocated to Victoria hospital in Kirkcaldy, its accident and emergency department closed, as did its maternity unit. People are suffering unnecessarily due to such service centralisations. My question to the cabinet secretary is quite simple: when will the people of Scotland's new city get the hospital services that they deserve?

Michael Matheson: As we do with other health boards, we expect NHS Fife to work in partnership with its local planning partners to look at how it can configure services to meet the needs of the local community, including in the way in which services are divided between Victoria hospital and Queen Margaret hospital.

The member will be aware that we have made significant investment in Queen Margaret hospital in recent years. We put in state-of-the-art surgical and diagnostics provision and a new minor injuries unit, we created a new community and child services centre and we provided for a comprehensive antenatal and postnatal care service for the local community. I have got no doubt that NHS Fife will want to continue to review its services to ensure that it meets the needs of the local community.

NHS Highland

(Additional Resources for Overspend)

8. Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what additional resources will be made available to NHS Highland, in the light of reports of an estimated annual overspend of over £55 million. (S6O-02487)

The Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care (Michael Matheson): The 2023-24 budget provides increased investment of £42.5 million for NHS Highland, meaning that the board's funding has increased by over 83 per cent since 2006-07. In addition, a further £14.6 million has been provided in year to support financial sustainability. The Scottish Government continues to work with all NHS boards to monitor their financial performance and to support the delivery of fiscal sustainability, including by providing additional support to NHS Highland to support financial recovery.

Edward Mountain: I am not sure what additional support that answer laid out. The consequence of the position that we are in is the cancellation of elective surgery. Added to that, a lack of an interventional radiologist and now the lack of a cardiovascular surgeon means that a perfect storm is brewing. How is the Government really going to help NHS Highland tackle those problems?

Michael Matheson: I have just set out the additional financial support that we have given this year and also the additional £14.6 million that we provided for this financial year to support financial sustainability. We continue to engage with NHS Highland about the financial challenges that it faces and to support it in meeting some of its recruitment challenges.

The member will also be aware of the very significant investment that we recently made in NHS Highland through one of our national treatment centres, which is a facility of more than £40 million that is providing improvements in the way in which care is provided to patients in a range of elective procedures.

Anniversary of the Death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

11:59

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Members will be aware that tomorrow is the first anniversary of the passing of Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. In the days that followed her passing, the Parliament came together to convey our sincere condolences to the royal family and to lead, with people across Scotland, tributes to Queen Elizabeth's remarkable life and, in particular, her bond with the Parliament.

In view of tomorrow's anniversary, we will have contributions from leaders before we move to First Minister's question time.

11:59

The First Minister (Humza Yousaf): One year since the passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, we are presented with a moment for reflection on a long and dedicated life of public service. I am sure that colleagues will remember with great pride the beauty of Scotland's landscapes and, perhaps more importantly, the warmth of Scotland's people on Her Majesty's final journey.

Her Majesty's deep fondness for Scotland was well known. It is here that Queen Elizabeth chose to spend her most private family moments each summer. It is within the halls and gardens of the palace of Holyroodhouse that Her Majesty welcomed thousands of community leaders, volunteers, artists, activists, faith leaders and essential and key workers, in recognition of their service to Scotland.

On behalf of the people of Scotland, I send my thoughts to King Charles and the royal family in their private remembrance tomorrow.

12:00

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Tomorrow, our thoughts will be with the King and the royal family on the first anniversary of the passing of Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. Twelve months ago, thousands of Scots gathered as her cortège made the final poignant six-hour journey from Balmoral to Holyrood palace, as she had wished. Flowers marked the route in Ballater, bagpipes played in Aboyne, farmers lined their tractors along the roadside and thousands stood on the Royal Mile to pay their last respects. Our late Queen brought the country together in her life and in her death. The late Queen cherished Scotland and, in her passing, the country showed how much it cherished her.

Tomorrow marks one year since we lost our late Queen, but on every day since then we have remembered her warmth, her leadership and her unstinting and dedicated service to this country for 70 years.

12:01

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): Our longest-serving monarch, Queen Elizabeth II, was a dedicated public servant, demonstrating strength, leadership and empathy when her country needed it the most. She brought our nation together at times of crisis and left a legacy of compassion in the various causes that she championed. She reminded us that, despite our political disagreements and arguments, everyone here in Holyrood is in the service of the Scottish people. Her kindness, wisdom and integrity are timeless values that will be passed down through the generations. Scotland will remember her fondly.

12:02

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): The passing of Her Majesty ended a constancy in the lives of everyone in the chamber. It was a moment in time that will come to define the early years of this century. Across these islands, the Commonwealth and, indeed, the whole world, there was a collective sigh of sadness and thanksgiving for her life of service.

In the minutes, hours and days that followed the announcement from the palace, operation Unicorn unfolded with quiet precision. I pay particular tribute to the staff of this Parliament and public service workers across Scotland for the many hours and days that they dedicated to that task. From the roadsides of Aberdeenshire to the catafalque at Westminster Hall, those days showed Scotland and the United Kingdom at their very best. I think that Her Majesty would have been pleased that so many marked her passing by engaging in the great British pastime of standing in line.

On this anniversary and on all those to come, we will hold the royal family in our thoughts and remember the extraordinary life and service of Queen Elizabeth II.

First Minister's Question Time

12:03

Policing

1. Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I remind members that my wife is a serving officer with Police Scotland.

As part of a pilot in the north-east of Scotland, front-line officers are being told to no longer investigate certain crimes. Scottish National Party funding cuts are forcing dedicated officers to ignore criminal acts. Some victims will report a crime to the police only to be told that it is not important enough to investigate. Will the First Minister tell us which crimes will not be investigated? (S6F-02315)

The First Minister (Humza Yousaf): Police Scotland's funding is not being cut. I am pleased to say that, despite United Kingdom Government austerity, and in recognition of the crucial role that police officers play, we have just announced, this week, an excellent pay offer, which I am pleased that police officers have accepted, and the service is receiving an additional £80 million in resource funding in 2023-24.

In relation to the north-east pilot that Douglas Ross mentioned, I will quote directly from the news release that the police put out in that region. It says:

"On some occasions, crimes are reported where there is no associated threat, risk, harm or vulnerability and"

—this is the important bit—

"also no proportionate lines of enquiry for local police officers to investigate."

It goes on:

"When this happens, our staff will inform the caller that the enquiry has been recorded and a crime reference number will be supplied, but no further action will be taken."

That seems like a proportionate approach to tackling crime.

Douglas Ross: So the First Minister is quite happy about that. That is incredible.

First of all, more pay for our officers is welcome. Fewer officers is not, and that is what we have now in Scotland. The First Minister cannot dodge responsibility. The measure is a result of SNP funding cuts, which is made clear in the letter that he just read out from Chief Superintendent Graeme Mackie.

The pilot is unfairly treating communities in the north-east as guinea pigs. They will receive a poorer service, despite paying their taxes like everyone else. In response to it, Scottish Police

Federation chair David Threadgold said that areas could be at increased risk as criminals target places where they know that crime will not be investigated.

Humza Yousaf would not let this rash experiment happen in Glasgow, so why is he content to let victims in the north-east go without justice?

The First Minister: That is complete and utter nonsense, turning one community in Scotland against another. What else would you expect from the divisive Conservatives? This is a policing operational matter.

Let me pull Douglas Ross up on a couple of points. First and foremost, Scotland has more police officers per capita than England and Wales—and, of course, they are on significantly higher pay here in Scotland, because we believe in paying our police officers fairly. In Scotland, we have 30 officers per 10,000 of the population of Scotland, compares with 25 in England and Wales.

Let me go back to the central point. Whether they are in Glasgow or the north-east, people in Scotland care about ensuring that recorded crime is at low levels. I am pleased to say that, under this SNP Government, recorded crime continues to be at one of the lowest levels ever since 1974, and is down 42 per cent since 2006-07.

Douglas Ross: North-east families should not be paying the price for SNP funding cuts, but that is what is happening here. The Scottish Police Federation said that the pilot could set a “dangerous precedent”. Officers are warning that it could be a slippery slope, unless Humza Yousaf steps in with more funding. Even today, Audrey Nicoll, the SNP MSP and convener of this Parliament’s Criminal Justice Committee has raised concerns about what is happening in the north-east of Scotland.

Will the First Minister tell us: is he going to act on those concerns, or let this happen across the country?

The First Minister: If Douglas Ross does not correct the record after this session, he is—frankly—happy to be inaccurate and misleading. Let me read again the facts. We are investing £1.45 billion in policing in 2023-24 and increasing the resource budget by 6.3 per cent, with an additional £80 million. Any suggestion that we are cutting funding is, I am afraid, simply untrue.

Let me go back to the press release that was sent out by the police in the north-east, because—again—it is an operational matter. It says that if

“crimes are reported where there is no associated threat, risk, harm or vulnerability and also no proportionate lines of enquiry for local police officers to investigate”,

officers will of course give a crime reference number and the crime will be recorded,

“but no further action will be taken.”

On this side of the chamber, we are ensuring that our police are funded, that there are more police officers on the street and, crucially, that recorded crime remains at one of the lowest levels in 42 years.

Douglas Ross: If anyone is going to be correcting the record, it is the First Minister, because we know that Police Scotland’s budgeted officer establishment has reduced from 17,234 to 16,600. There are fewer police officers on the beat in Scotland and they are being told not to investigate crimes. Why are they being told that? It is because of funding.

If the First Minister will not believe what I am saying, maybe he will listen to Deputy Chief Constable Fiona Taylor. She said that the force is facing “Hard choices” and that the

“levels of service we provide to the public ... will inevitably reduce.”

That is a direct consequence of SNP funding cuts. Officers do not have the resources to do their jobs, people who report crimes will be told, “Tough luck”, and it is open season for criminals under the SNP.

Why is the First Minister telling offenders that they can break the law and get away with it here in Scotland?

The First Minister: Douglas Ross, with that question, demonstrates why he should never, ever be allowed to be First Minister of this country: he is panicking and alarming people with sensationalism, all for cheap political headlines. That is what Douglas Ross is interested in.

What we are interested in is results. Those results see there being more police officers per head of population in Scotland than there are in other parts of the UK, and more investment in our police in comparison with the previous year. We also see lower recorded crime rates here in Scotland than when we took office—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear the First Minister.

The First Minister: I say to Douglas Ross, when he talks about difficult public finances, that they are difficult because of Westminster austerity; because of cuts to our budget; and because of the disastrous mini-budget. Just under a year ago, Douglas Ross demanded that the Scottish Government follow Liz Truss’s path, and now he wants tax cuts for the wealthy.

We will continue to invest in our public services. I say that, when it comes to the public finances, Douglas Ross has no credibility whatsoever.

Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (Schools)

2. Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): The news this week about the risks of reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete, known as RAAC, is causing understandable anxiety for parents, pupils and staff.

The Government has confirmed that 37 schools have been identified as containing RAAC. When did the Government first become aware of the issue, and what steps did it take? Will the Government commit to publishing a list of the schools that are impacted, so that parents and pupils have at least some of the answers that they deserve?

The First Minister (Humza Yousaf): We were informed about RAAC not just for many months, but for years, and that is why, for example, we ensured that our education leaders had the appropriate guidance from the Institution of Structural Engineers last year.

We have been proactive over that period—in particular, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills has been proactive in holding discussions with local authorities in order to ensure that we have a full understanding of the picture.

I can confirm, given that we have further information back from local authorities, that 40 schools with RAAC in them have been identified and the appropriate mitigations have been put in place.

On Anas Sarwar's direct question, which I think is very fair—yes, we will work with local authorities to ensure that that information is published. I would expect publication to happen at the end of the week—we will publish not just a list of the schools that have been affected, but more information, if we can give it, around the mitigations that are in place, which will give some confidence to parents, and indeed to pupils and staff, in those schools.

We are working with local authorities to ensure that that information is published, and the cabinet secretary will lay out some of that detail in a statement later this afternoon.

Anas Sarwar: The Institution of Structural Engineers says that it began inspections in schools for RAAC in 2018, and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service says that it warned two years ago that buildings are at risk of collapse. It is important, therefore, to know what steps the Government took, especially since—as the First Minister said—it has known about this “for years”.

Specifically on the schools that are impacted, how many schools are subject to either a partial or complete closure; how many are subject to the additional building works or emergency engineering support; and what resources are being made available to local authorities to deal with those buildings that are affected?

The First Minister: There are a number of questions—again, if we do not get to the detail of them all, I am happy to write to Anas Sarwar with full details.

The mitigations that are in place vary from school to school. Various schools and other owners of public sector buildings have put in place a number of mitigations. I take local authorities and schools as an example. St Kentigern's academy in West Lothian has closed part of its estate, including the dining and kitchen areas. Preston Lodge high school in East Lothian has closed off impacted classrooms and other areas. Each school will determine the position, given the Institution of Structural Engineers' guidance, and will then choose to put the appropriate mitigations in place.

Fire stations that have also been affected have already put in place mitigations. Again, I am happy to furnish Anas Sarwar with some of the detail on that.

We are aware that some local authorities want a discussion around funding. We will continue to have those discussions with local authorities, but ultimately they are the ones that are responsible for the safety of the school estate.

I noted that the Chancellor of the Exchequer of the United Kingdom—in fact, the Prime Minister of the UK—said that funding would be made available to help with mitigations in relation to RAAC. However, in the past 24 to 48 hours, I have seen the UK Government roll back on that commitment. We will continue, therefore, to have conversations with the UK Government—in fact, the Deputy First Minister wrote to the Treasury last month, on 16 August, to call for the allocation of additional funding to remediate RAAC issues.

I know that Anas Sarwar has asked a number of questions, and I am happy to go back to him in writing with fuller detail.

Anas Sarwar: I welcome the commitment to publish a list of schools, and I ask that that public information includes what mitigations are taking place in those schools, in order to give that reassurance to parents.

The Government has delayed the next phase of its school rebuilding programme. Local authorities submitted bids a year ago and were meant to get an answer by the end of 2022. We know that at least five of the schools on that list contain RAAC,

although I suspect that the actual number will be far higher. Those schools are still waiting, so that must be dealt with urgently.

The issue goes beyond our schools. We know that 255 national health service buildings across Scotland are being surveyed for suspected RAAC. When will those surveys be completed? When will we have the complete list of all public bodies affected? How soon will we have a timetable for any required remedial action, so that we can give patients, staff, parents and pupils the reassurances they deserve?

The First Minister: Again, I am more than happy to furnish Anas Sarwar with further details in writing if I am not able to get through all the questions that he asked.

On the school estate, we will be making decisions on the learning estate investment programme imminently, but we are also now looking at that programme through a RAAC lens—I think that it is important for us to do so.

This Government has a good record when it comes to building schools and carrying out substantial refurbishments of schools: since 2007-08, 1,098 school builds or substantial refurbishment projects have taken place. Anas Sarwar will be aware that the school estate statistics that came out just a couple of days ago show that 91 per cent of schools in Scotland have a “good” or “satisfactory” condition rating, which is significantly improved from when we first took office.

On the NHS, a major study is already very much under way, led by NHS Scotland Assure. The desktop review exercises that took place showed that 254 buildings have two or more characteristics consistent with the presence of RAAC. The next phase of the survey has commenced and nine of the 40 buildings that have been surveyed have been confirmed as containing RAAC.

Anas Sarwar’s original point is a fair one. We will work with partners—not just local authorities, but NHS boards and others—to see how much of that information can be put out publicly. I hope that Anas Sarwar and others will appreciate that that will be an evolving picture as those surveys continue to progress.

Attainment Gap

3. Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government’s response is to data showing that the attainment gap has increased. (S6F-02318)

The First Minister (Humza Yousaf): In fact, the poverty-related attainment gap is narrower than it was before the pandemic for national 5s, for

highers and for advanced highers, which shows progress in education recovery and in closing the poverty-related attainment gap over the longer term.

We have seen good progress in primary school literacy and numeracy, with the latest data showing the biggest-ever reduction in the gap. We have seen a record-low poverty-related attainment gap and positive destinations for school leavers nine months after leaving school, with record-high numbers of students from deprived areas entering university in 2021-22.

All of that, plus the ambitious aims that local authorities have set and are setting for the longer term, gives me great confidence that we are making good progress and that our £1 billion investment in the Scottish attainment challenge is indeed having an impact.

Liam Kerr: The First Minister chooses his data carefully, yet he fails to acknowledge that the attainment gap between the least and most deprived pupils has widened for the third year in a row. We must be clear that that is through no fault of teachers, pupils or staff.

Although his predecessor promised to eliminate the attainment gap, his ambition, as set out in the programme for government, is limited to merely narrowing it. So, what narrowed gap would be acceptable to this First Minister, and when, does he project, will he deliver it?

The First Minister: Of course, Liam Kerr is not comparing like with like. We are comparing this year’s figures with pre-pandemic figures.

I say to Liam Kerr that he forgets to place emphasis on the fact that this is a poverty-related attainment gap—that is the point: the attainment gap is related to poverty. If Liam Kerr really cared about tackling it, he would use any of the minuscule influence that he has in his own party to demand that it scraps the two child limit, scraps or reverses the reduction in universal credit and scraps the benefits freeze. Those three measures alone would lift 30,000 children in Scotland out of poverty. So, while Liam Kerr may well wipe away those crocodile tears, we in the Scottish Government will get on with the job of protecting Scots from the harm of a Westminster cost of living crisis.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): In many areas in Scotland, including Glasgow, the attainment challenge funding is being used to backfill cuts to core education funding. Why does the First Minister think that that is? Does he accept that that dedicated funding, which was put in place to tackle the attainment gap, has failed to do that in a substantial way?

The First Minister: No. I have just said in reply to Liam Kerr that we are making inroads in relation to narrowing the poverty-related attainment gap. Of course, the funding for local authorities has increased in comparison with the previous financial year. With the £1 billion Scottish attainment challenge, we are ensuring that we are giving £520 million to the pupil equity funding for headteachers. There is also direct funding for all 32 local authorities for the first time and additional funding to support the attainment and wellbeing of care-experienced children and young people.

I say to Pam Duncan-Glancy, who I know cares deeply about these matters, that we can go only so far in relation to the poverty-related attainment gap because although we have some powers to reduce and tackle poverty, I am afraid that the substantial levers are still in the hands of a Conservative United Kingdom Government. I want to change that, and I hope that Pam Duncan-Glancy does, too.

Drug Deaths

4. Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): To ask the First Minister whether he will provide an update on the steps that are being taken to reduce drug deaths in Scotland. (S6F-02343)

The First Minister (Humza Yousaf): We remain absolutely committed to delivering the national mission to reduce drug deaths and improve the lives of those who are affected by drugs. The latest drug deaths statistics reported a 21 per cent decrease in 2022. I welcome that reduction, which is the highest on record, but I am also quite clear that those numbers remain far too high and that every life lost is an absolute tragedy. My thoughts are with the families that have been impacted and affected. That is why the national mission includes an additional £250 million investment over the course of this parliamentary session to improve services and backs radical approaches that are evidence based—that phrase is absolutely crucial—whether that be a proposal to establish a safer drugs consumption facility or arguing for drug law reform.

The Minister for Drugs and Alcohol Policy will make a statement later this month to update Parliament more fully.

Emma Harper: The Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 is over 50 years old. It is not fit for purpose and it must be reviewed urgently.

The Home Affairs Committee recently published a report that called for a review of drug classification and a new health-led approach to tackling drugs, with a trial of safe consumption rooms. Can the First Minister provide an update on what engagement the Scottish Government has had with the United Kingdom Government

regarding the urgent need to reform the draconian Misuse of Drugs Act 1971?

The First Minister: The points that Emma Harper makes are well made. In July, the Scottish Government published a paper that set out our bold and ambitious proposals for drug law reform to ensure that we treat problematic drug use as a health matter and not a criminal matter. I was heartened that there was much support for that not just domestically but internationally and globally from experts and those who work on the ground to tackle the issue of drug misuse. That is, as Emma Harper said, complemented by the recent very welcome report from the Home Affairs Select Committee, which is clear about the need to reform the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971.

The Minister for Drugs and Alcohol Policy met the UK minister for policing on Tuesday this week and raised the issues with him. If the UK Government will not take the necessary actions to use the powers that it has to help us to combat the challenge—the problem and crisis—it should at least devolve the powers to us so that we can take a different approach here, in Scotland.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): The Dogs Against Drugs charity assists Police Scotland with search and seizure of illegal drugs arriving in Shetland alongside its educational preventative work. Police Scotland's Shetland area commander has credited the dogs with a vital role in the seizure in Shetland of drugs with a value of around £750,000 in the past 18 months. One dog—Thor—which is retiring, is credited with having found an estimated £1 million-worth of illegal drugs over its nine-year career. Without core funding, the charity's future is under threat. If it ceases, it will likely cost the taxpayer more in the long run.

I have recently met the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs to discuss the issues. Does the First Minister agree that Dogs Against Drugs is an important asset to both Police Scotland and the Shetland community and that it would be a significant loss were it to cease?

The First Minister: I agree with Beatrice Wishart. I know of Dogs Against Drugs—I remember it well from when I was justice secretary. Funding had always been an issue for the organisation, which is why I was pleased that it received additional funding from—I think—the serious organised crime task force. I believe that a good meeting took place between the justice secretary and Beatrice Wishart. If we can do anything more to support Dogs Against Drugs, we are open to that, within the difficult financial circumstances in which we are operating.

**Professor Sam Eljamel
(Independent Public Inquiry)**

5. Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):

To ask the First Minister, following the publication of NHS Tayside's "Due Diligence Review of Documentation Held Relating to Professor Eljamel", whether the Scottish Government will immediately approve an independent public inquiry. (S6F-02323)

The First Minister (Humza Yousaf): This is a deeply important issue and I can inform the chamber that the Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care, Michael Matheson, will use his statement to the chamber this afternoon to confirm that the Government has decided to commission a full independent public inquiry.

That decision comes after very careful consideration of the recent due diligence review, which stated that concerns about professor Eljamel were not acted on with the urgency that they deserved. In the commissioning of the inquiry, it remains important that those people who are directly affected are still supported to find the answers that they need and that both staff and patients across Scotland know that lessons are being learned.

The cabinet secretary has considered the latest report from NHS Tayside and we have collectively concluded that it requires investigation, independent of both board and Scottish Government. The cabinet secretary for health will set out the details of the next steps in his statement this afternoon.

Michael Marra: Scottish Labour welcomes that inquiry. It should not have taken us so long to get here. The inquiry has been wrung out of the Government like blood from a stone by Jules Rose, Pat Kelly and the many victims who were weeping outside Parliament yesterday—many in permanent and debilitating pain.

As late as last week, the First Minister and health secretary maintained that a public inquiry would not take place. That damning internal review from NHS Tayside, which the First Minister has mentioned, says that they knew that Eljamel was incapable and dishonest yet allowed him to continue unchecked. That review revealed, too, that the NHS Tayside board has done nothing to deliver on a raft of recommendations from previous reports into that scandal. What will the First Minister do today to ensure that those recommendations are acted on immediately?

The First Minister: I disagree with Michael Marra's characterisation. Both the health secretary and I have always said that a public inquiry had not been ruled out. I hope that Michael Marra understands that it is appropriate that we allow

reviews, such as the due diligence review that has taken place, to progress right to their conclusion. Having seen the extremely disturbing detail of that due diligence review, the cabinet secretary for health and the Scottish Government have concluded that a public inquiry is necessary because of the failings that that report has exposed.

Let us be clear about two things. First, Professor Eljamel is responsible for his despicable actions and, where there are systemic failings, they must absolutely be exposed and interrogated and lessons must be learned, which is why the public inquiry is so important. Secondly, I have a point of consensus with Michael Marra and agree that, although many MSPs deserve credit for raising these issues, it is, of course, the brave patients who have spoken out about their suffering—Jules Rose, Pat Kelly and many others—who deserve the credit for this announcement around the public inquiry.

A further question for us to explore—Michael Matheson will lay this out in detail in his statement—is whether another process will need to take place alongside the public inquiry, which answers the questions that patients rightly have around their individual cases, as that is something that a public inquiry would not necessarily be able to do.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I welcome the decision and pay considerable tribute to Jules Rose, Pat Kelly and all the other patients who have been fighting the case for 10 years. Aside from the public inquiry, will the Scottish Government consider a victim support fund for the former patients and their families?

The First Minister: As Liz Smith knows well, there are appropriate routes for compensation that families can go through in relation to health boards. If there are other avenues that we can explore to support patients, we will give that consideration. There are already established avenues for patients who have suffered as a result of the national health service to claim compensation. However, those can be difficult to navigate at times, so we will give consideration to any other avenues of support that we can provide.

There has been a good cross-party effort. MSPs such as Shona Robison, Joe FitzPatrick, John Swinney, Jim Fairlie, Graeme Dey, Willie Rennie and Michael Marra have all raised these issues. It is important to pay particular credit to Liz Smith, who has raised these issues diligently and in a considered manner for many years. I thank all the MSPs who have raised these important issues on behalf of the patients they represent.

Renewable Energy (Economic Benefits)

6. Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): To ask the First Minister how the Scottish Government plans to maximise the economic benefits, including the number of new jobs, that result from any growth in renewable energy sources, including onshore wind. (S6F-02348)

The First Minister (Humza Yousaf): Scotland has the skills, talent and resources to become a global renewables powerhouse. We are investing almost £5 billion over this session of Parliament in the energy transition, and finalising an onshore wind sector deal. That will include halving the average determination time for new section 36 onshore wind applications, as well as maximising the benefits for Scotland's economy and, crucially, for local communities.

We are also determined to maximise the opportunities from offshore wind. I welcome developers' commitment to invest an average of £1.5 billion per project in the Scottish economy. We are embracing the opportunities that our flourishing clean hydrogen sector will bring, which will help to support jobs, boost energy security and open export potential. Our finalised energy strategy and just transition plan will set out how we can maximise those opportunities, including jobs in renewable energy and energy supply chains for a highly skilled and flexible workforce.

Ross Greer: Wind power in Scotland is growing, which is good for our climate, jobs and economy. Last year, onshore renewables in Scotland grew at almost twice the rate that they grew in England. The programme for government will further unlock growth in green energy.

This week, in contrast, the United Kingdom Government failed to genuinely lift its absurd wind farm ban in England. The Tories are wrecking our climate and holding back growth in a key industry. The Scottish Government must do more to capture the benefits of it and other growing green industries for the people of Scotland. How will the new green industrial strategy and the sector deal for onshore wind create new jobs and supply chain opportunities across Scotland?

The First Minister: Ross Greer is right about the damning approach that the UK Government has taken in the face of all scientific evidence on the climate catastrophe that is unfolding right now. As I announced this week, we are establishing a sector deal, which will be incredibly important because of the scale of the potential that we have to realise our collective ambition of delivering 20GW of onshore wind by 2030, and to do so in a way that benefits local communities. That is why the deal that we are negotiating will enable increased investment in skills training and additional investment in communities. It will also

create pathways for long-term sustainable energy jobs and supply chains, with a focus on circular economy opportunities.

Furthermore, building on our final energy strategy and just transition plan, we will work closely with businesses and industry to develop our green industrial strategy by summer next year. That will set out how we will help businesses and investors to create good well-paid jobs as part of our fair, green and growing economy.

Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP): Industry bodies, including Scottish Renewables, are clear that there is, in order to maximise the economic opportunities from renewable energy, a need for a robust evidence-led and action-driven green industrial strategy that should address the challenges on skills and investment that Government and industry can deliver on, together. What plans does the Government have to bring forward that strategy and what timescales are involved?

The First Minister: We will work closely with business and industry to develop a green industrial strategy by the summer of next year. It will set out how the Scottish Government will help businesses and investors to realise the enormous economic opportunities, including jobs, of the global transition to net zero. That strategy will build on the finalised energy strategy and just transition plan to offer a clear evidence-based view of the economic sectors and industries in which we have the greatest strengths and the most potential.

We will do everything that we can to support such sectors to thrive. Some of the levers are very much in our hands, but many—particularly tax incentives and financial incentives—lie with the UK Government. That is why I wrote this week to urge the UK Government to discuss the good ideas that are in the report of the Hunter Foundation—that is Sir Tom Hunter's foundation—on using economic levers, whether they are in the hands of the Scottish Government or the UK Government, to their maximum effect in order to boost growing sectors, such as the renewables sector in Scotland.

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

HMP and YOI Stirling

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Over recent weeks, there have been continued disturbances at the new prison facility HMP and YOI Stirling, which are causing local residents great distress. The incidents include screaming, shouting, swearing and banging coming from the prison at all times of the day and night since it opened. Together with the Scottish Prison Service, what action will the Scottish

Government put in place to tackle and rectify those disturbances, which locals describe as creating a living hell, and to support the vulnerable offenders?

The First Minister (Humza Yousaf): We certainly do not want communities to be disturbed or inconvenienced in the way that Alexander Stewart described. I will ask the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs to write to him to see what more can be done.

The Prison Service takes seriously its obligations to the young people in particular who are in its facilities, in order—we hope—to aid rehabilitation. It also takes seriously its obligations to the communities that facilities are in. I will ask the cabinet secretary, who undoubtedly raises such issues with the Prison Service, to meet Alexander Stewart and see what more can be done.

The Presiding Officer: I call Christine Grahame.

NatureScot Licences

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): Oh! I thought that I had been dismissed.

Recently, it was reported that NatureScot issued 46,985 licences over five years to authorise the culling of native wild species, including thousands of geese, ravens and iconic mountain hare. Does the First Minister share the concerns of animal welfare organisations—and me—about the size of that number? I declare an interest as the convener of the cross-party group on animal welfare.

The First Minister (Humza Yousaf): I noticed that Christine Grahame took a bit of time there as she was not sure whether she was going to be called. Forgive her, Presiding Officer—she is quite new to Parliament.

On the serious question that Christine Grahame raised, the numbers cause us all to pause and reflect. I know that NatureScot takes licensed control of wildlife very seriously. That is done only when no alternative exists. Licences are issued only in accordance with strict criteria that are laid down in law, but there are occasions when wildlife needs to be controlled, when it presents a risk to human health or safety.

As I said, such decisions are not taken lightly at all. They can involve, for example, consideration of protecting air safety around airports, safeguarding food production and retail environments, and protecting crops in fields.

As part of the Bute house agreement, we will undertake, in this parliamentary session, a full review of the species licensing system. I will ensure that the appropriate cabinet secretary and

minister investigate the numbers that Christine Grahame mentioned and write back to her with a fuller response.

Covid-19 (Vaccinations)

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Covid rates are rising, and two wards at Vale of Leven hospital have been closed because of Covid. The number of beds that are occupied in hospitals across Scotland is going up, which is putting even more pressure on the national health service.

We know that vaccination is an important line of defence, but there appear to be problems with the vaccination programme. When a couple in their 70s who had booked their Covid and flu vaccinations arrived at their vaccination centre this week, they were told that no Covid vaccine was available. They and 350 other people were sent home.

Is the First Minister aware of a problem with the supply of vaccines? When will Covid vaccinations actually start?

The First Minister (Humza Yousaf): I am not aware of any problem with the vaccination programme or with the vaccine supply or stock. My understanding is that we have good supply and good stock, but I will ask the Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care to examine that point in more detail and write to Jackie Baillie.

Jackie Baillie is absolutely right that the vaccine is the best form of defence against Covid. The Government cannot be, and is not, complacent about the fact that Covid is still within our communities, still harming people and still impacting on our public services, including our NHS. If Jackie Baillie furnishes us with the details, I will ensure that those specific incidents are looked into, and I give her my assurance about the vaccine supply and stock.

School Leaver Destinations

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): The disaster of Brexit that Scotland did not vote for has, among other things, narrowed opportunities for some of our young people. With that in mind, can the First Minister provide an update on what proportion of school leavers have gone on to positive destinations?

The First Minister (Humza Yousaf): This summer, we had encouraging statistics that showed that more than 93 per cent of 2021-22 school leavers were in a positive destination nine months after the end of the school year. That is the highest level since comparable data was first gathered in 2009-10.

The member is, of course, right to note that Brexit has narrowed opportunities for young people. One of the most damaging examples of that was the UK's decision not to participate in Erasmus+. We are determined to ensure that our young people, particularly those from our most disadvantaged communities, can benefit from educational exchange opportunities, which is why, in the programme for government, I committed to developing the Scottish education exchange programme to deliver some of the opportunities to our young people that Brexit has robbed them of. However, I am afraid that anything that we do as an alternative to Erasmus+ will never quite be as good as that programme in the European Union. Those in Scotland know that the only way that Scotland will be able to rejoin the European Union is as an independent nation.

Snowdrop Memorial Garden Dunfermline (Vandalism)

Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The First Minister will be aware of the repeated desecration of the Snowdrop memorial garden in Dunfermline cemetery. Desecration of memorials is detestable. Words can neither describe how detestable those acts of vandalism are nor the emotional trauma that is caused to the families of babies who are remembered at the site. Incidents such as this are happening too often, and it is left to volunteers to clear up the mess that is left by mindless vandals. What more can the Scottish Government do to support our local councils with funding and resources for something as simple as closed-circuit television cameras to deter the culprits of those horrific crimes and help to bring them to justice?

The First Minister (Humza Yousaf): Roz McCall is absolutely right. Those are despicable acts. There can be no words of condemnation strong enough to articulate and express our collective horror at such acts of desecration.

On what more can be done, I am more than happy for the appropriate minister to have conversations with our local government partners to see whether we can do anything further collectively to deter such acts. It is also important that we do our best to try to work with anybody who is desecrating those memorials to see whether we can do more to divert them from such despicable behaviour. The police will, of course, determine whether crimes have been committed and what action can be taken.

One of our local councillors, Councillor Naz Anis-Miah, who I know well, was one of the volunteers who was involved in cleaning up the baby memorial. I commend those volunteers, but it should not be left to volunteers to do that—such desecration should not be happening in the first

place. The Government will reach out to local authorities to see whether there is anything that we can do to support them and any action that they are taking to stop such acts.

Football Supporters' Buses

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): Does the First Minister agree that the UK Government's transport commissioner's draconian proposals for football supporters' buses needs to be shown the red card?

The First Minister (Humza Yousaf): Absolutely. I have no idea why those proposals have been touted in Scotland. I have no idea why the UK's traffic commissioner and the UK Government think that the proposals have any place in Scotland. The proposals are for voluntary guidance so I suspect that they will be ignored, and I would support that action.

I align myself closely with the Scottish Football Association, the Scottish Professional Football League, the Scottish Women's Premier League and many teams across the country who have condemned the proposals. I confirm to Stuart McMillan and other members that the proposals have been brought forward without a single word of consultation of Scottish Government ministers, the football authorities or—most important, I suggest—the thousands if not millions of football fans who would be negatively impacted by them.

The Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport, Maree Todd, wrote to the commissioner yesterday to better understand where the ludicrous proposals have come from. The Scottish football governing bodies and football fan organisations have already issued strong statements, setting out their concerns, and they have my absolute full support in that.

Criminal Justice (Sentencing Guidelines)

Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): Three months ago, I asked the First Minister about a murderer and rapist who received a shorter prison sentence due to new sentencing guidelines for under-25s. Since then, countless other violent criminals—adults, by any definition—have also had their sentences reduced. Can Humza Yousaf tell the victims, most of whom are women, why his Government will not step in and scrap this weak and dangerous practice in the Scottish justice system?

The First Minister (Humza Yousaf): The member asked the question while fully knowing the answer. Those are Scottish Sentencing Council guidelines that are not made, derived from or approved by the Scottish Government; they are approved by the senior judiciary. Given how horrifying some of these cases are—the cases

that Russell Findlay mentioned are absolutely horrifying—I can understand the temptation for MSPs to demand that the Government take action. However, if we were to do so, we would be interfering in the independence of the judiciary, which is a cornerstone of our democracy and of the rule of law.

Sentencing decisions are very much for the independent judiciary. I am sure that it will have heard the concerns that Russell Findlay and many other members have raised. However, it is important to say that the Sentencing Council guidelines are evidence based.

We have announced an important bill that will put victims and witnesses at the heart of the justice system even more than they are. I hope that Russell Findlay and the Conservatives will support that bill as it goes through Parliament.

NHS Lothian (Edinburgh Eye Pavilion)

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): The First Minister will be aware that the new eye pavilion in Edinburgh has suffered delay after delay. Over the past few weeks, fresh doubts about its 2027 opening have arisen after NHS Lothian told patients and campaigners that timescales would be confirmed once the Scottish Government had completed a review of funding and sequencing on a number of capital projects.

Will the First Minister confirm today to Parliament that the new eye pavilion will open in 2027? Will he meet me and eye pavilion patients to reassure them that the Scottish Government will fund that vital project, given that it was not mentioned in the programme for government?

The First Minister (Humza Yousaf): I am happy to confirm that we are absolutely committed to the eye pavilion. Sarah Boyack is right that there is a review of the capital projects that we are funding right across Government. That review is very much still on-going, which is why we are not able to confirm the timelines.

There has been a significant reduction in our capital budget by the Westminster UK Government, which I am afraid has impacts. There is also the disaster of the mini-budget last year, which has meant that inflation and construction costs have risen exponentially. That is why the capital programmes review has to be undertaken. When it is complete, we will ensure that Parliament is updated accordingly.

I am sure that the cabinet secretary will be happy to meet Sarah Boyack and patients in the local area on the plans in relation to the eye pavilion.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes First Minister's question time. The next item of business

is a members' business debate in the name of Carol Mochan. There will be a short suspension to allow those leaving the chamber and public gallery to do so.

12:48

Meeting suspended.

12:50

On resuming—

Alcohol Services

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-10032, in the name of Carol Mochan, on investing in alcohol services to reduce alcohol-related harm in Scotland. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises what it sees as the urgent need for action to address the highest number of deaths from alcohol in over a decade, with a reported 22% increase in alcohol-specific deaths in the last two years following the COVID-19 pandemic; believes that this increase is likely due to changing drinking habits, alongside reduced access to services; considers that the risk of alcohol harm is already greater for the most disadvantaged in society, with people in Scotland's most deprived communities reportedly over five times as likely to die and six times as likely to be admitted to hospital because of alcohol than people in the wealthiest communities; believes that, while deaths are the most extreme form of alcohol harm, these are likely to be accompanied by increases in other harms, such as alcohol-related diseases, accidents, violence, unemployment, family and relationship breakdown, domestic abuse, child neglect and foetal alcohol spectrum disorder; notes the belief that a plan is needed to address what it sees as this public health emergency, and further notes the campaign by 36 charities and health bodies, including the Directors of Public Health in Scotland and the East Ayrshire, Dumfries and Galloway, Scottish Borders and South Lanarkshire Alcohol and Drug Partnerships in the South Scotland region, which calls for urgent action as well as increased and sustained investment in alcohol services and recovery support, alongside a renewed commitment to preventative policies recommended by the World Health Organization on pricing, availability and marketing.

12:50

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): It is unfortunate that today's debate is required, but I am pleased to have the opportunity to bring it to the chamber. At the outset, I wish to thank Alcohol Focus Scotland, Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems—SHAAP—and others for the briefings that they have provided members with ahead of the debate.

I am pleased that the Minister for Drugs and Alcohol Policy is attending the debate, and I am pleased to see some Government back benchers attending, too. However, as of this morning, not a single Scottish National Party or Scottish Green MSP had signed the motion. In his speech on Tuesday delivering the programme for government, the First Minister did not mention recently released statistics regarding alcohol-specific deaths. Yet again, we are promised a

review of strategy and a review of delivery, but action feels as far away as it ever has been.

I offer these words to the minister: if our approach to investing in alcohol services to reduce alcohol-related harm does not include accepting where we have gone wrong in the past and where we are currently not quite getting it right, we are doing a disservice to those who already are—and those who will become—dependent on alcohol, as well as to their friends, their families and their communities.

It is important to note that, in total, 1,276 deaths were attributed to alcohol-specific causes last year. That is 31 more than in 2021 and is the highest number since 2008. That is 1,276 individuals whose lives were lost before time, and whose friends and families have lost a loved one.

This is a public health emergency. I think that we all accept that. However, I join with key stakeholders today in asking why the amount of alcohol-related harm and the number of deaths have not convinced the Government that the matter is worthy of an emergency response. We have had no ministerial statement, no debate in Government time and no real path to delivery from the First Minister or the Minister for Public Health and Women's Health. We can do so much better. Those who are suffering due to alcohol-related harm deserve better, and so do the countless families, friends and communities that have seen too many lose their lives to alcohol without the correct support being in place.

Taking a somewhat deeper look at the tragic announcement in recent weeks, we see further causes for concern. While male deaths continue to account for about two thirds of alcohol-specific deaths, the number of female deaths increased by 31 in 2022. It is pivotal that we analyse the detail and do all that we can to ensure that the increased number of female deaths is not repeated, and that we also reduce the number of male deaths from alcohol.

As we see in the motion, although deaths are the most extreme form of alcohol harm, they are likely to be accompanied by increases in other harms, including domestic abuse and violence, and we know that those harms disproportionately impact women. I repeat that this is a public health emergency, and I highlight the importance of having a multilayered response that addresses key factors including causes, related harms and improving outcomes.

I often take the opportunity in the chamber to call for the reduction and eradication of health inequalities. As the motion states,

"the risk of alcohol harm is already greater for the most disadvantaged in society, with people in Scotland's most deprived communities reportedly over five times as likely to

die and six times as likely to be admitted to hospital because of alcohol than people in the wealthiest communities”.

That is the devastating reality—one that our most deprived communities have to live with every day.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): A statistic that we have looked at before shows that binge drinking is more prolific in our most deprived communities than in our least deprived communities. That must point to the fact that there are fewer services available in our most deprived communities, which results in an imbalance in alcohol deaths. Does Carol Mochan agree with that?

Carol Mochan: My view is that it is an extremely complex picture. A lot of our difficulties in more deprived areas are a result of the fact that services are much less accessible. We also have a system that builds in inequalities, so we have to look right across the board at what we can do to support such communities.

The impacts of alcohol harm are wide ranging and can affect anyone. However, the fact that, in 2023, those harms are still felt so acutely in our most vulnerable communities is appalling, and we need to ensure that our approach to tackling this public health emergency is underpinned by a desire to support those people who are most in need. The approach needs to be preventative in nature by tackling the root causes of alcohol harm, which perhaps comes back to Brian Whittle’s point. We must be strong in our approach to advertising where we have the powers to be so, we must put people before profits and, for those who are already dependent, we must have the right support services in place, through investment in our alcohol and drug partnerships, to give people an offer of hope at an otherwise incredibly challenging time.

As I said at the beginning of my remarks, this is not a debate that any of us want to have, but, due to the situation that we find ourselves in, it is necessary to have it. It is a debate that we need to have in Government time so that families and communities can see how seriously the Government takes the issue.

The number of alcohol-specific deaths in Scotland is at its highest level in 15 years, and, at the same time, there are 40,000 more children living in poverty in Scotland than there were a decade ago. The link between alcohol harm and poverty is damaging and well established, and we must do everything in our power to break that link.

Again, I pay tribute to the first-class organisations that research alcohol harm or suggest ways through this emergency; to those who provide services to people who are alcohol dependent; and to our great national health

service staff, who always do their best to act when they are called on. They are all part of the fight, but they are being let down. They need a change of approach that shows urgency and tackles the emergency. So far, the Government has not stepped up to the mark, so I implore the minister to take the opportunity today to feed back and tell us how it will tackle what is an emergency for our communities.

12:58

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): As co-convenor of the cross-party group on drug and alcohol misuse, and as the vice-chair of Moving On Inverclyde, which is a local recovery charity, I thank Carol Mochan for securing the debate. She spoke in the debate on liver cancer on 14 June, which I secured. The same issues that were relevant to that debate are relevant to today’s.

In recent years, a greater focus has been given to tackling drug-related harm, which is welcome. However, many people in the recovery sector have expressed concerns about the impact that that has had on efforts to reduce alcohol-related harm. As per the motion,

“with a reported 22% increase in alcohol-specific deaths in the last two years following the COVID-19 pandemic”,

I am sure that we all agree that equal attention must be given to alcohol-related harm.

Sadly, between 2017 and 2021, Inverclyde reported the highest rate of alcohol-specific deaths in Scotland, with the majority of those deaths caused by alcohol-related liver disease. In addition, more than one in four people who live in Greenock and Inverclyde drink quantities above the chief medical officer’s low-risk drinking guidelines, placing them at a higher risk of developing alcohol-related liver disease. Sadly, that worrying local trend reflects an alarming national picture across Scotland, as the number of people in Scotland whose death was caused by alcohol has risen to the highest level in 14 years.

The motion before us suggests that changes in drinking habits, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, have played a part in the recent spike in alcohol-related deaths. Through my involvement with Moving On Inverclyde, I can attest to that. Having been a board member of that organisation for eight years, I have seen it go through many changes. The reasons for people seeking help have varied. With the move out of lockdown, Moving On Inverclyde found that a greater number of people needed support for alcohol misuse. The minister heard about that when she visited Moving On Inverclyde over the summer recess.

It is easy to see how people being stuck in the house for long periods of time with little

opportunity to interact with others at home or in public settings could lead to their drinking more heavily. It was always considered that other harms could follow on from the Covid restrictions, and the impact that those restrictions have had on people with substance dependence is clear. Figures from the National Records of Scotland show that 1,276 people died from alcohol-specific causes in 2022. That amounts to three people in Scotland dying every day because of alcohol harm.

I thank the British Liver Trust for bringing its “Love your liver” roadshow to Scotland earlier this year to help to raise national awareness of the risk factors for liver disease, which include excess alcohol consumption. I hope to bring the “Love your liver” roadshow to Inverclyde in the autumn, so that people in my constituency can access non-invasive liver scans and learn more about improving their liver health. Scanning using FibroScan technology is quick, easy and painless, and it could lead to some of my constituents learning that they might have liver damage and being given a letter to take to their GP that recommends further investigation. That could help them to reduce the risk factors and, ultimately, save their lives.

I again thank Carol Mochan for securing the debate. The issue of alcohol-related harm is a hugely important issue for the country. There is no quick fix. If there was, it would have been implemented by now. The motion talks about the need for a plan. Carol Mochan spoke about the urgency of the situation and said that we face an emergency. The use of the words “urgency” and “emergency” is entirely accurate. However, it will take a bit of time to develop a plan. Wide discussion and dialogue will be critical in enabling us to get to where we all want to be—in a situation in which fewer people in Scotland die as a result of alcohol-related harm.

13:02

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): I refer to my entry in the register of members’ interests—I am a practising NHS general practitioner—and congratulate Carol Mochan on securing time for this most important debate.

We have a problem with alcohol. That includes the binge drinking that is seen up and down our towns at weekends. In my GP practice, I see many patients who have issues with alcohol or drugs, as a consequence of which their mental health is deteriorating. Many patients whom I speak to do not realise that drinking, say, two glasses of wine after work to relax and unwind equates to a minimum of 42 units a week. Given that 14 units a week is the recommended maximum level, they are shocked to discover that and, naturally, they want to reduce their drinking. Therefore, I support

Drinkaware’s coming campaign to make more people aware of how much they are drinking.

The SNP has been responsible for health in Scotland since May 2007 but, last year, 1,276 Scots died as a result of alcohol. Their families are grieving. Alcohol-related deaths are at their highest level since 2008, with people in our more deprived communities suffering the most.

When it comes to alcohol, the SNP has tried one flagship approach, which has made alcohol more expensive for the less well-off. The trouble is that people are going without food instead. The minimum unit pricing policy has now been discredited by the SNP itself, yet it seems to be the only plan that the SNP has for tackling alcohol harms. That is why it put a more convenient and positive spin on a Public Health Scotland report into minimum unit pricing by shoehorning words such as “significant” into the draft in order to claim a slam-dunk success, but MUP has not been a slam-dunk success. The SNP also had to make a humiliating climbdown when it was accused of misrepresenting the analysis by spinning estimates as facts. In addition, it implied that the resounding success that it claimed MUP had been was based on 40 studies, which was not true.

Yesterday in Parliament, cabinet secretary Michael Matheson argued that many leading experts have repeatedly said that MUP is making a positive impact on the issue. What he failed to mention is the many evidence-based studies that question that analysis, which is why the Scottish Government and its spin doctors had to rewrite their public announcements. Furthermore, it is crystal clear that there are more alcohol-related deaths now than there were in 2018, when MUP was introduced. Men living in deprived areas are drinking more with MUP in place and others are switching to drinking spirits. MUP has abandoned dependent drinkers.

If we are ever to get a grip on the crisis, people suffering from dependence should have the right to access treatment and rehabilitation. That right to recovery approach is backed by front-line experts. The evidence suggests that direct intervention works and improves outcomes, so let us concentrate on that.

13:06

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): I thank my colleague Carol Mochan for bringing forward this timely debate to highlight the rising level of harm being caused in Scotland by alcohol, which is exacerbating health inequalities and adding to the huge but avoidable pressures faced by our NHS, at huge cost to our economy.

Carol Mochan is right when she says that this is a national crisis. The latest figures from National

Records of Scotland show that almost 1,300 people died last year from conditions caused by alcohol, which is the highest figure in 14 years and is up 2 per cent on the previous year. Although we can always use different reference points and figures, it is clear that the situation is becoming more serious.

Our most disadvantaged and marginalised communities are disproportionately impacted by the harms that are caused by alcohol. Shockingly, people in Scotland's most deprived communities are reportedly five times as likely to die and six times as likely to be admitted to hospital because of alcohol as are people living in the wealthiest communities.

The crisis directly impacts my constituents. NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, my local health board and the largest in the country, recorded Scotland's highest rate of mortality caused by chronic liver disease. This is, indeed, a crisis.

That is unacceptable and highlights the need for urgent action to strengthen prevention and improve access to services. It is important that there are facilities to help women offenders, which has been a key focus for this and previous Governments. There was a question yesterday about the 218 service, which is something that I know about because it was set up under a Labour Administration. It provides a very important alternative to custody for many women, including those who are alcohol-dependent, but it faces deep cuts. I wonder how that fits with the Government's strategy on women's offending and the crisis that we face.

Six months ago, Justina Murray of Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs told the Criminal Justice Committee that one of the biggest barriers to effective change comes from implementation. She said:

"In Scotland, we are really good at writing down what we want to do—we have all the right things written in legislation, strategies and policies—but we do not implement what we say we will. We are good at saying what we are going to do, but we are not so good at doing what we should be doing. There is not really any accountability in the system ... there are still significant failings in treatment, care and support services."—[*Official Report, Criminal Justice Committee, 22 March 2023; c 7.*]

Much more immediate work is required to reduce alcohol-related harms and death. The long-term funding of relevant services is absolutely vital in tackling the rise in alcohol-related deaths. We need services throughout the country, and the third sector must be appropriately funded in order to sustain those services for the foreseeable future.

Make no mistake: this is a public health crisis that should be taken as seriously as the crisis of drug-related deaths. In Scotland last year, 21 per

cent more people died because of alcohol than because of drugs. It is clear that we must tackle both crises. Stuart McMillan made that point earlier and I agree with him. It is time to view alcohol as one of the biggest threats to population health. Every year, alcohol costs Glasgow, the region that I represent, an estimated £365 million, which equates to £615 per person.

Aside from the horrific impact that alcohol has on people's lives, which Carol Mochan talked about, it has a hugely detrimental impact on economic growth and workforce productivity.

Every life lost is a tragedy, so we must do more to ensure that vulnerable people have access to local community services and the resources to reduce alcohol abuse and alcohol-related deaths in Scotland.

I want to make special mention of Alcoholics Anonymous, which is an organisation and a fellowship that has helped millions of people—and it means a lot to me. The mentoring system and the 12-step programme has given me the opportunity to try to understand alcoholism and the complexity behind it, and I realise that there is not one simple answer.

The organisation has something to offer to the overall strategy on alcohol. Sandesh Gulhane talked about the fact that alcohol is an issue that affects all communities and all classes, as well as about how dangerous it is to focus only on one policy. It is my personal experience, based on talking to people who have been seriously dependent and who have almost risked their lives, that people have been saved by services and by Alcoholics Anonymous. I also agree with Mr Gulhane's point that affected people will do anything to get access to alcohol because of their dependency on it. There cannot be a one-size-fits-all solution to this. We need to realise that it is a complex issue.

Once again, I thank Carol Mochan for bringing this important debate to the chamber.

13:11

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I echo the thanks to Carol Mochan for securing time for this important debate. It is important that Government time in the chamber is made available for this vital topic. I also offer special thanks to the campaigners who have fought tirelessly to bring this conversation for public debate, some of whom are watching today's debate from the public gallery. I hope that the debate can be the catalyst for more meaningful political action, and as I said, a debate in Government time.

We have heard that this is an emerging crisis. It is a hidden crisis, with more than 1,200 people losing their lives last year alone to alcohol-specific deaths in Scotland, which is the highest figure in 15 years. That is worthy of note, macabre as it is. We all agree that, behind each of those deaths is an irreparable tear in countless families and communities. However, that statistic only scratches the surface of the harm that alcohol misuse is causing in our communities. I want to ensure that when we discuss alcohol issues we recognise that, like other forms of substance abuse, it is a sickness that is caused by a multiplicity of factors, including socioeconomic issues—which I will speak about later—trauma, and potentially genetics. It is essential that any action that is taken is driven by understanding and, more important, that we act with compassion.

The long-term effects of alcohol misuse, including long-term health and addiction issues, can impact on future generations. At the beginning of the year, Scottish Liberal Democrat research revealed that, since 2017, more than 1,100 babies have been born dependent on substances, including alcohol. Alcohol misuse has other ripple effects, including the intensification of domestic abuse, child neglect and family and relationship breakdown.

Brian Whittle: I was listening to Alex Cole-Hamilton talk about the impact on the unborn. Does he also recognise that we are starting to understand the impact of foetal alcohol syndrome disorder, and that about 170,000 people in Scotland could be suffering from that condition?

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I am grateful for that excellent intervention. It is vital that we consider the impact of that. The early days of life begin before birth, and what can happen in utero can lead to lifelong and life-altering consequences. Before I came to this place, I worked closely with other colleagues as part of the “Putting the Baby IN the Bath Water” coalition. We need to talk more about foetal alcohol spectrum disorder, so I am grateful to Brian Whittle for that intervention.

It is estimated that alcohol misuse costs Edinburgh more than £220 million per year and, during the past two years, there has been a reported 25 per cent increase in alcohol-related deaths. That increase was in large part caused by the strictures of lockdown and the mental health impact of that, but we cannot assume that, with the abatement of the pandemic, those numbers will also abate. That supports expert theories that the Covid-19 pandemic has had a lasting effect on people’s drinking habits, which has subsequently led to an increase in high-risk and harmful drinking.

The fact that alcohol misuse appears to be worsening is just one reason why we need urgent

action. Although the Scottish Government has recognised alcohol harm as a public health emergency, there is yet to be an emergency response. We desperately need a strategy and effective policies.

One such policy that has been adopted, whose impact we are just now seeing, is minimum unit pricing. My party supported the introduction of the policy, and promising data is being produced, but we need to continue to monitor its efficacy when we review its potential renewal—that is something that will challenge us all in the coming months.

MUP is just one tool, however, and it is by no means enough to tackle the issue. Alcohol services are still reeling from SNP-inflicted cuts. We remember that, in 2015, the Government cut funding to services in ADPs by nearly 25 per cent, and those have still received no real-terms increase in funding, according to Audit Scotland. As a result, they are struggling to maintain their service—the relationships that they provide and sustain—amid rising costs, coupled with rapid increases in demand. That is why 36 charities and public health bodies, including the directors of public health in Scotland, have called on the Government to urgently provide increased and sustained investment in alcohol recovery and support services.

As I alluded to, we cannot ignore the root causes of why people drink and why they harm themselves with alcohol use. People in the most deprived communities are five times more likely to die and six times more likely to be admitted to hospital due to alcohol-related causes. That is a health inequality and is attached to unresolved childhood trauma, as is drug abuse. That is why the Scottish Liberal Democrats would establish a new specialist family drug and alcohol commission, which would offer accessible wraparound services, taking a holistic, community-based and trauma-informed approach to substance and alcohol misuse.

The experts have been unequivocal about the extensive harm that alcohol misuse is inflicting on us and in their assessment of it. It is our duty to listen to them and to treat the issue with the attention, urgency and compassion that it deserves and requires.

13:17

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): I, too, thank Carol Mochan for bringing forward the debate, and offer my condolences to anyone who has lost a loved one to alcohol misuse. I also thank Alcohol Focus Scotland and SHAAP for their tireless efforts to tackle alcohol-related harm. Every alcohol-related death is a preventable tragedy.

This is a human rights issue. As elected representatives, we have a responsibility to act on it. Many others have covered recovery and treatment services. My contribution will focus on the other side of the issue: prevention and the specific actions that we need to take to address the alcohol deaths emergency. Inevitably, that will mean tackling alcohol marketing, which encourages people to start drinking and to drink at higher levels.

We know that exposure to alcohol marketing is a cause of youth drinking. Decades of research have concluded that alcohol marketing leads young people to start drinking earlier and to drink more. Clearly, allowing the industry to self-regulate is not working. In a UK survey, 82 per cent of 11 to 17-year-olds reported having seen alcohol advertising in the past month.

Alcohol marketing affects not just young people. It encourages consumption and risk-taking behaviour among heavier drinkers, causes higher craving levels and fosters positive alcohol-related thoughts. That can seriously impact people who are struggling with their alcohol use, or who are in recovery.

Alcohol advertising makes drinking seem more attractive and encourages high consumption. Restricted alcohol marketing benefits everyone. In fact, it is recommended by the World Health Organization as one of the most effective ways of reducing consumption and the health and social harms that alcohol causes.

Other European countries have already taken action. Ireland recently introduced legislation to ban alcohol advertising during sporting events and—crucially—events that are aimed at children. It is also restricting alcohol advertising outdoors and on public transport, as well as how and where alcohol can be displayed in shops and supermarkets.

Scotland would do well to follow Ireland's lead and be bold in its efforts to tackle the proliferation of alcohol marketing. Measures recommended by the alcohol marketing expert network include restricting advertising outdoors and in public places, in sports and event sponsorship and in retail display and promotion. Those measures should be introduced as soon as is practicable and I look forward to hearing any updates that the minister has about timescales for upcoming consultations.

I turn to the introduction of an alcohol levy. I have long believed that the polluter-pays principle should be applied to the sale of alcohol. The alcohol industry makes huge profits from the sale of alcohol and should contribute towards mitigating the harm that is caused by the products that it sells. Retailers should not be allowed to keep the

additional profits that they make from minimum unit pricing, which should be invested into prevention and treatment services.

Alcohol Focus Scotland also advocates for the introduction of an alcohol harm prevention levy. That would be raised through a supplement on non-domestic rates for retailers and applied to premises licensed to sell alcohol for consumption off the premises. I have raised that matter in the past and I would be grateful if the minister could update the Parliament on the Government's current position on the proposal and advise what consideration is being given to introducing such a levy.

There are many actions that we can take to tackle alcohol-related harm. Now is not the time for timidity or hesitation. Too many lives and too many families are being destroyed. We must act and we must do it now.

13:21

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I thank Carol Mochan for bringing the debate to the chamber. As we get the welcome news that drug deaths have started to decline—which is excellent news, albeit that their numbers are far too high—we are hit with the news that alcohol deaths are rising. It is important to note that, for people who are caught in addiction, alcohol and drugs are almost interchangeable. In fact, especially with drug addiction, there is usually an alcohol element as well.

I want to clarify my intervention on Carol Mochan. I am co-convenor of the cross-party group on health inequalities. I was surprised to hear at the CPG that people in the most deprived areas are more likely to abstain from alcohol than those in the least deprived but that the impact of alcohol abuse and consumption is much more catastrophic in the deprived areas. We talked about the inequality of access to services about which Carol Mochan spoke.

In the previous session of the Parliament, we all agreed to minimum unit pricing, albeit with a sunset clause. We need to understand why the figures are so stark despite the introduction of minimum unit pricing and what impact the measure has had. Even if it has had an impact, which I hope it has, alcoholism will not be cured by increasing the price of alcohol alone. I am concerned that the Scottish Government's approach has relied far too much on minimum unit pricing and that not enough has been done on education, for example. I refer not just to direct education on the dangers of alcohol abuse but education on the alternatives that are offered to our youngsters.

Members will not be surprised to hear me refer to the inequality of access to sport, music, art and drama, and increasing budgetary constraints on our third sector organisations, which Pauline McNeill mentioned, in relation to the rising addiction numbers. In many cases, the third sector organisations are the ones that have access to the people who are most isolated in our communities

I ask the Minister for Drugs and Alcohol Policy to inform members how she is working with her colleagues on the matter. It will take work across portfolios, especially with the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills and the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, to address it. The issue is complex, as Carol Mochan said, and it will take much more than we are doing to tackle the problem. The minister will understand that this is an issue that unifies us across the parties.

Stuart McMillan: During the minister's recent visit to Inverclyde, a number of the service users of the organisation that I referred to pointed out the amount of activities that are available in the local area and said that, prior to their addiction, whether to drugs or alcohol, they did not realise that there was so much to do in the area. The member's point about the issue being complex is an accurate one, but his trying to lay the blame on the lack of funding for third sector organisations or in communities is not entirely accurate.

Brian Whittle: I thank Stuart McMillan for his intervention, but I have to disagree with him on a specific point. I have a specific interest in sport, and I have mentioned often in this chamber that sport is becoming the domain of the middle classes. How we allow access to sport and many other activities surrounding it is an issue that we need to consider. I have talked many times about the school estate; indeed, that is why I have mentioned the education establishment. It is one of the battlegrounds where we need to tackle this matter, as it will allow us to engender different interests in people.

However, I do not think that we are speaking at cross-purposes here. Our views are very much in the same vein, and perhaps enthusing our youngsters to do something else or ensuring that there is something else on offer other than the boredom that leads to much of this will be part of the complex response that we need to make. In that respect, I would be very grateful if the minister could let us know how she is working with colleagues across other portfolios, especially in education.

Once again, I thank Carol Mochan for bringing this important debate to the chamber.

13:26

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): I congratulate Carol Mochan on sponsoring the motion and for bringing the debate to the chamber. I agree with her that, as the evidence that we have heard over the past 45 or however many minutes shows, we need a proper debate in the chamber during Government time to discuss this very important issue.

As we all know, our country has a complex relationship with alcohol. That is not a recent discovery—it has been going on for generations. I completely agree with the quotation that Pauline McNeill read out; I do not know who it was from, as I did not write it down, but I was struck by it. We are so good at talking about the problem and at producing words, papers and strategies, but we are just not any good at delivering any change on the issue. That has gone on for far too long, and I therefore absolutely echo Carol Mochan's comments about the need for a full debate in Government time, with all the parties putting forward their ideas on what we will do to change our country's trajectory in relation to alcohol consumption and dependency.

Enough is enough. People are dying, and anyone who has ever spent time supporting someone struggling with alcohol dependency and dealing with all the illnesses that are contingent on their alcohol addiction will know that it is heartbreaking. Through that one person's life, so many hearts are broken.

I have never felt that it was my job as a politician to tell people how to lead their lives—I just do not see that as my role—but I absolutely believe and agree with colleagues who have said that it is our duty as parliamentarians to work together to create public policy that makes a difference and which enables people to make better choices. To those who argue that alcohol consumption is entirely a personal decision that is nothing to do with the Government or with public policy, I am afraid to say that that argument crumbles in the face of the gentlest scrutiny and all the evidence of our life experiences.

In his remarks, Sandesh Gulhane talked about the nature of the impact of this problem on families, communities and society at large. We do not live our lives as isolated beings; even though we have our individual identities and preferences, we are woven together. I absolutely subscribe to the notion that we are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, and that is why we as members of the Scottish Parliament have a solemn responsibility to do something about alcohol addiction as it impacts and harms individuals, families, communities and our country.

However, prioritising collective actions or blunt instruments over individual responses is not the answer. Again, Dr Gulhane made very clear our position on minimum alcohol pricing. As well intentioned as that is, it is not meeting need. Frankly, it is easy for all of us to picture someone with an addiction, but what do they do when they face higher prices? They do without in other essential areas, and that impacts other people in the process.

My time is up, so I will conclude by saying that we need to chart a new course for Scotland on this issue. Enough of the talking, the strategies and the reviews—let us do something. Let us, for example, invest in local rehabilitation centres across the country, and let us put help easily within the reach of every person who needs it and those who are trying and striving to support those who are struggling with the problem.

Moreover, let us educate our young people. We must deal with the problem at root and create a better relationship between the people in our country and alcohol. Let us deal with the behaviour issues that arise from the misuse or abuse of alcohol through binge drinking and other activities and deal properly with the antisocial behaviour that arises through such abuse. Let us deal with the issues that my constituents in Falkirk, for example, talk about such as excessive noise, violence, graffiti and litter left in the wake of those who have been intoxicated and disruptive in the street or the community.

The failure to hold individuals accountable for their behaviour sends a destructive and dangerous message about what behaviour is permissible. By failing to act, we are perpetuating a vicious cycle of harm, and I therefore appeal to the minister to talk to her colleague, the Minister for Parliamentary Business, to see that there is a full debate on this issue as soon as possible.

13:32

The Minister for Drugs and Alcohol Policy (Elena Whitham): I thank Carol Mochan for lodging her really important motion, and I also thank members for their considered contributions this afternoon. From the outset, I want the chamber to know that I support the motion.

We all agree that urgent action is needed to address the number of deaths from alcohol and to reduce alcohol-related harm. I offer my condolences to all the families who have been impacted by alcohol deaths and restate my commitment to do everything in my power to tackle this public health emergency. As a member of a family that has been affected by the matter, I have to say that it is personally important to me.

As we have already heard, National Records of Scotland has reported a 2 per cent increase in the number of alcohol-specific deaths in 2022. The mortality rates in the most deprived areas are more than four times as high as those in the least deprived areas, and according to Public Health Scotland statistics, admission to hospital was six times higher from the most deprived areas. Those gaps are reducing over time, but they are clearly still far too large, and tackling poverty must remain a clear focus for us all.

I am also particularly concerned by the reported rise in the mortality rate for women and the over-65s. We must ensure our prevention policies and treatment services address the specific needs of those groups and are tied into the work being carried out across Government that Brian Whittle and others have talked about. We need to respond to the health inequalities that are experienced acutely by women but by other groups, too; indeed, we should also note the increase this year in the deaths of women by suicide. We need to look at how all of these things are tied together and whether, as Alex Cole-Hamilton has suggested, some of this has come out of the pandemic. It remains to be seen whether the situation will continue, but we really need to keep a close eye on it.

The motion asks Parliament to note its belief that

“a plan is needed to address”

this “public health emergency”. In response, I will set out the Government’s plan for doing so. However, I agree with everybody: the issue is so large that we need to find time to bring it back and Government time to start considering it fully.

On pricing, we will soon be laying our report on the operation and effectiveness of minimum unit pricing in line with our commitments under the Alcohol (Minimum Pricing) (Scotland) Act 2012. I look forward to discussing with Parliament the next steps for that flagship policy, as well as launching a public consultation on its future. It is, as some members have said, not a single magic bullet, but is part of a suite of things that we are trying to do.

Minimum unit pricing was a whole-population attempt to drive down consumption. From the reports that we have seen, we know that there has been a 3 per cent reduction in overall consumption, but I am acutely aware of how that impacts dependent drinkers, so I will keep that under close consideration. We will have a full debate on that when we get to it.

Linked to that work is the outcome of our alcohol marketing consultation, which closed in April. In the coming months, we will publish the findings and our next steps, including how we further engage on this critical issue. We will also continue

to keep any proposals for a levy under consideration.

On harm reduction, alcohol brief interventions can help clinicians and patients to identify harm-reduction behaviours or the need for outside support in reducing alcohol intake. We have just completed a comprehensive review of ABIs, which will be published shortly. It will include recommendations, and we will provide Parliament with details of the actions that will be taken in response to those to make improvements that help reduce harm and can improve outcomes for people impacted by alcohol.

The earlier that we can do the work to identify people who are drinking at harmful or hazardous levels, the better. I welcome the work that Drinkaware is undertaking on helping people to self-identify issues and I look forward to seeing how that can work in tandem with the review of alcohol brief interventions.

On increasing access to treatment, we have asked Public Health Scotland to investigate the reduction in numbers for referrals to services. We need to ensure that referrals are made wherever appropriate and that there is capacity within services to meet peoples' needs. Therefore, it is vital that we understand what is behind the data.

I also want to understand where the gaps in data are, as Pauline McNeill mentioned. How do we understand how many people are engaged in fellowship organisations throughout the country? Those organisations are vital and help many people.

Brian Whittle: I used to question the Minister for Drugs Policy about this. If we can understand why Scotland has such a problem with drugs and alcohol, it would be very helpful for finding a solution to the matter. Is the Scottish Government doing any work to understand why we have a particular issue in Scotland?

Elena Whitham: We saw the findings of the Scottish Drugs Deaths Taskforce. Some of those findings on drugs can be extrapolated to alcohol harms. However, as Carol Mochan pointed out, the picture is complex. We need to continue to examine the matter to understand what is driving consumption in our communities. Some of it is to do with poverty and inequality but a lot of it is to do with other matters. The increase in over-65s is particularly perturbing to me. Is there something to do with retirement age that means that people's habits start to change? I assure Brian Whittle that examining that matter over time is a key part of what I want to do.

Stephen Kerr: Will the minister take an intervention?

Elena Whitham: I cannot, sorry. I do not have enough time. There is just too much to talk about. That speaks to why we need a further debate in the chamber.

We have just commissioned Healthcare Improvement Scotland to take forward work to enable us to deliver our mental health and substance use plan. The first part of that work is currently under way as HIS works with stakeholders to develop an exemplar operational protocol to set out how mental health and substance use services should work together. That is vital, given the number of alcohol-specific deaths that were caused by mental or behavioural disorders. We cannot allow people to be bounced between services.

Workforce—recruitment in particular—is a challenge across all services at the moment. In the autumn, we will publish a workforce action plan on alcohol and drug services to help shape recruitment, retention and service design. That should help to create service capacity to make improvements, such as establishing alcohol care teams in hospitals to identify people with underlying alcohol problems earlier. I am meeting the chair of the group on that this afternoon.

I am meeting local leaders across the country to ensure that they are committing effort and resource to ensure services are in place, accessible and effective. I also recently wrote to ADPs to reassure them that it is welcome if they use national mission resources to support services that offer treatment and support to people who are impacted by alcohol use alongside those who are impacted by drug use. Any concerns that they have should be flagged to my officials.

To help to ensure that changes are delivered, the Government has committed to developing treatment standards to offer people better access to support and a wider range of choices in treatment, in line with what is available through the medication-assisted treatment standards. The standards will be informed by the United Kingdom-wide clinical guidelines for alcohol treatment that will be launched in the coming months. The implementation of those guidelines and our proposed standards will provide the impetus for improving the identification and testing of patients who are at risk of liver disease in primary care. As we have heard from Stuart McMillan, that is welcome.

On recovery services, we are encouraging specialist services to link more closely with recovery communities and we continue to provide funding to third sector recovery groups. We are on track to increase our beds from 425 to just shy of 600 in this session of the Parliament, which is a 40 per cent increase. That represents about 1,000 publicly funded placements, which is important.

There are innovations such as the Simon Community's managed alcohol programme, which seeks to drive harm reduction for people who are drinking at the most harmful levels.

There is so much in the issue that I cannot get through all of it. However, as the minister with responsibility for both drugs and alcohol, my role is to drive improvements in outcomes for people who are impacted by alcohol, drugs or both and do so in all the ways that help to tackle the twin public health emergencies. The Government will continue to work with statutory and third sector partners to deliver the plan to reduce alcohol harm and alcohol deaths. I will work at pace to bring all of that together to ensure that our ambition is communicated effectively, and I will seek to bring the matter back to the Parliament.

13:41

Meeting suspended.

14:00

On resuming—

Motion of Condolence

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of a motion of condolence, in the name of Humza Yousaf, in tribute to Winnie Ewing—an inspiring and hugely influential politician. An MSP, MP and MEP, she was also, of course, the first person to chair the reconvened Scottish Parliament in 1999. The flags outside the Parliament are lowered today as a mark of respect.

I call the First Minister to speak to and to move motion S6M-10350.

14:01

The First Minister (Humza Yousaf): It is with great sadness that I move the motion of condolence in my name, paying tribute to Winnie Ewing. I cannot pretend that my speech—or, I suspect, any of the speeches today—will do full justice to such a remarkable and unique life.

Born in 1929 into a Scotland, and a world, that were very different from our own, Winifred Margaret Ewing was brought up in Glasgow. She became active in politics while studying law at the University of Glasgow, joining the student nationalist association—which a few of us are familiar with. It was there that she met one Ian Hamilton, who asked her whether she would like to be part of an infamous trip down to Westminster abbey to repatriate the stone of destiny. The only thing that prevented Winnie Ewing from making that journey was that she did not have a driver's licence, and Ian Hamilton needed a driver. In the life of a trailblazer who achieved so much, it might be fair to say that that was the only stone that she left unturned.

Even at that point in Winnie's life, she was clearly destined to be a trailblazer. For a woman, in those less equal days, a high-profile career in law was something of a rarity. And a career in politics? Forget about it. It was unheard of for a woman—particularly for a woman of the nationalist persuasion. During the 1950s and 1960s, Winnie's legal career began to flourish. At that time, she met her beloved husband, Stewart, and they would go on to have three children.

Winnie was studying for the English bar when a by-election was declared in the constituency of Hamilton. As we all know only too well, by-elections are remembered and have a national impact only when the result is an upset—which would be something of an understatement when it came to Winnie Ewing's incredible victory in 1967. Not to overstate it, I say that it was seismic.

Professor James Mitchell best summed up its profound significance when he wrote:

“After Hamilton, politics in Scotland would be viewed through a Scottish lens by all parties seeking support north of the border”.

Although she failed to hold on to her Hamilton seat in 1970, Winnie was elected again in 1974 to serve the people of Moray. Shortly afterwards, she began her long career as a member of the European Parliament. She secured some spectacular successes for the Highland communities that she represented. She helped to secure objective 1 assistance for the whole of the Highlands and Islands in 1989, which opened up major resources for infrastructure and employment projects.

Winnie was clearly motivated by her desire for Scottish independence, but she was also involved in major international issues of the day. Her infamous declaration, “Stop the world—Scotland wants to get on”, has been quoted countless times, but the context in which she said it is often forgotten. At a time when Scotland had no national Parliament and little international personality, Winnie worked tirelessly to foster understanding of Scotland and good will for our nation, as a friend of a range of prominent European and international figures. Those figures included the likes of Jacques Chirac and Golda Meir, as well as politicians from across the island of Ireland, including John Hume, Ian Paisley and Éamon de Valera, whose funeral she attended by hiring a small plane at her own expense.

As a member of the European Parliament, she was also elected as a parliamentary delegate to the Lomé convention, which was a trade-and-aid agreement between European, African, Caribbean and Pacific nations. That opened the door for Winnie to work on a variety of international issues of importance. Memorably, she succeeded in bringing the Lomé assembly to meet in Inverness.

It is fair to say that Winnie was known for her compassion and for tirelessly fighting for those who did not have a voice. Winnie was a champion of the Jewish dissidents in the Soviet Union. One such prisoner was Wolf Zalmanson, whose case she publicised and campaigned for relentlessly, until he was finally released to Israel. Winnie devoted much of her career to speaking out for those who could not speak for themselves.

Above all, she sought to build a Scotland that looked outwards, making a positive contribution to the world around us and, by doing so, enriching ourselves. She knew that a key part of that would be to mobilise Scotland’s young people. In her maiden speech as a member of Parliament, in 1967, Winnie had spoken in favour of reducing the voting age to 18. Years later, as an MEP, she was an architect—for which she deserves enormous

credit—of the European Union’s Erasmus student exchange programme, which I hope Scotland will, in time, be able to rejoin.

Even after all of that, Winnie was not finished. In 1999, she was elected to the first Scottish Parliament, and, as the oldest member, it fell to her to open the first session. We can only imagine the emotions that she felt as she paid tribute to colleagues and friends from across political parties who had campaigned for decades to see this very place become a reality.

However, Winnie’s message on that hopeful day was very much one for the future. Winnie said that, if the 1707 Parliament’s demise had been

“the end of an auld sang”,

the creation of this place allowed us to write a new one. She urged us

“to sing ... in harmony”,

and to do so with

“fortissimo”.—[*Official Report*, 12 May 1999; c 6.]

Down the years, there has certainly been a lot of fortissimo in this building, and sometimes even a fair amount of disharmony, but we should never allow ourselves to forget that there has also been a lot of harmony. Across political divides, this chamber has been able to fulfil Winnie’s wish by working together, and I think that it is fair to say that, as a Parliament, we have achieved a lot over the years for the people whom we represent.

This Parliament has also helped Scotland to build relationships with new friends and partners the world over. The Scottish National Party would categorically not be where we are today without Winnie’s contribution. With her passing, my party mourns the loss of a giant of our movement, in both her contribution and her sheer force of personality. Equally, Scotland as a whole has lost a relentless champion and a true pioneer.

To Fergus, to Annabelle and to Terry, and to all of the Ewing family, we offer our condolences, but we hope that your grief is tempered by an enormous pride for your wonderful mother and a wonderful grandmother—for a life that was well lived, and lived ultimately in the service of others. On behalf of the whole chamber, I say: thank you, Madame Écosse. [*Applause.*]

I move,

That the Parliament expresses its deep sadness at the death of Winnie Ewing; offers its sympathy and condolences to her family and friends; recognises the historic place she will hold in Scottish political life having served in three Parliaments as a result of her victory in the 1967 Hamilton by-election, her election as an MEP, and as an MSP, where she presided over the reconvening of the Scottish Parliament; further recognises the high esteem in which she was held by colleagues from all parties, and

appreciates her contribution as a principled public servant dedicated to the people of Scotland.

14:08

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):

There are not many politicians who, while never achieving senior office in Government, nevertheless become household names, but Winnie Ewing certainly falls into that category.

The First Minister referenced Winnie Ewing's interest in and appeal to young people. I well remember being at school in Inverness in the 1970s—Winnie Ewing was already a household name by that point, and at that time was the MP for Moray and Nairn. In my primary school, everyone wore on their blazers little yellow badges in tribute to her, bearing the legend, "It's Scotland's Oil". It might amuse members to know that my own blazer might have borne such a badge—although, to the relief of my colleagues behind me, I should say that my political beliefs have matured since then.

Even back then, Winnie Ewing was well known as an energetic campaigner and someone who fought hard for her constituents. She lost her seat in Westminster in 1979 to the Conservative candidate, but she bounced right back, fighting the European Parliament election as a candidate for the then Highlands and Islands constituency just a few weeks later, in due course beating the well-known Liberal, Russell Johnston, who had been MP for Inverness.

I can well remember the pictures of Winnie Ewing attending the Camanachd cup final, which, if I recall correctly, was being played at the Bught park in Inverness. Winnie was only part of the crowd, but she quickly realised that Russell Johnston, her opponent in the election, was a member of the official party and was having the players presented to him before the match, so she took it upon herself to run across the pitch, pursued by a television camera, and insert herself—uninvited—in the official party. She was certainly never shy of putting herself forward and never wanted to miss an opportunity to be in the limelight.

I am now the only Conservative MSP whose time in this place overlapped with Winnie's, in the first session of this Parliament. Despite our political differences, I always found her to be engaging company and, on more than a few occasions, we found common cause. I recall one particular occasion, when Winnie had stood down as an MSP but had been invited as an honoured guest to the opening of the new Parliament building in 2004. Due to the security around the late Queen, who was performing the opening, all the roads around the Parliament had been closed to traffic. I happened to meet Winnie as she

stepped out of a taxi at the top of Abbeyhill, very frustrated that she was so far away from the Parliament building. She quickly discovered that she was wearing quite unsuitable shoes for the long walk down Abbeyhill, so I offered her my arm to assist her on the journey, and we proceeded arm in arm towards the Parliament building for the royal opening. On the way, she regaled me with various tidbits of political gossip that, even now, I would not dare repeat to the chamber. I remember that, as we came in sight of the front of the Parliament, she complained bitterly to me that the union flag was flying above the building. I thought that it might be impolite to disagree with her—or maybe I was just terrified—so I maintained a diplomatic silence at that particular point.

Winnie Ewing was not just a nationalist icon but someone who was highly respected across the political spectrum, having served in three different Parliaments. She will be greatly missed by all those who knew her, and by many who did not ever have the chance to meet her but knew her simply by reputation. My condolences and those of my party go to the whole family, but in particular to our colleagues Annabelle and Fergus, who, as well as losing a political mentor, have lost a dear mum. I know how proud Winnie was of them both and how much she enjoyed seeing how their careers developed and seeing them take up the causes that she fought so hard for.

14:13

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): It is an honour to speak today on behalf of the Scottish Labour Party in memory of Winnie Ewing. Before I begin, I also take the opportunity to again offer my condolences, and those of everyone at Scottish Labour, to the family of Winnie Ewing, in particular to Annabelle, Fergus and Terry. To many members on the SNP benches and to many more SNP members across the country, Winnie Ewing was, and remains, an iconic figure and an important part of their lives, so I am sure that many SNP MSPs have felt her absence keenly, and they, too, have my sincerest condolences.

It is hard to think of Winnie Ewing and the story of her life without thinking of the story of Scotland in the 20th and 21st centuries. She may have been christened Madame Écosse for other reasons but, in many ways, the political and public life of Winnie Ewing serves as a crucial insight into the changes that Scotland has been through. At a time when it was rare for young women to receive a university education and to enter politics, Winnie Ewing did both, and she did not pull up the ladder after her: she was generous in her encouragement of women across all parties. Further, far from picking an easy life, Winnie Ewing joined the SNP, whose members were, at that time, more likely to

visit London to try and liberate the stone of destiny than to enter the House of Commons. However, as the First Minister said, she was indeed a trailblazer.

In one of many by-elections in the Hamilton area, Winnie Ewing scored a remarkable victory for the SNP that sent shock waves throughout the United Kingdom. In part because of that success, Labour fast-tracked its long-held plan for a Scottish assembly. Therefore, the Parliament that we are all in today is very much part of the Winnie Ewing story.

As an MEP, Winnie became famous for her very forthright speeches in the European Parliament, as she did later as a grandee in the Scottish Parliament. I was pleased to be in the chamber when, in that role, she had the historic privilege of opening the Scottish Parliament in 1999 and reconvening the Parliament for the first time since 1707, and the first time under a representative democracy. The legacy of Winnie Ewing is clear for all to see in the electoral success of her party and the articulate and thoughtful work done in the chamber by her children Fergus and Annabelle and by her daughter-in-law, Margaret Ewing, who also served in the Scottish Parliament.

I always looked forward to Winnie Ewing's contributions in the Parliament, even though we occasionally disagreed. I have to be honest: she could be quite fearsome when she was disagreeing. I also have to say that she often gave a harder time to her own side than to me. That is an honourable tradition that has been reintroduced by her children. [*Laughter.*]

I will conclude with an anecdote. When I was door knocking recently—I will not be so cruel as to say where—I came upon the doorstep of an older gentleman; some would say that he is a wiser gentleman. He is now an ex-SNP member. In a lovely conversation, he told me that he had joined the SNP in 1967 due to the inspirational Winnie Ewing and her win in the by-election, and that he still held her in the highest regard. While the electoral fortunes of political parties come and go, it is clear to see that, above the ebb and flow of the tide of politics, the influence and legacy of Winnie Ewing live on.

14:17

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): I begin, as others have, by offering my and my party's sincere condolences to Winnie Ewing's family and friends. I know that, for many in the chamber, she had an impact on not just their political journey but their personal life.

Winnie Ewing's impact on Scottish politics and her party is undeniable. There was a historic by-election win for the SNP in Hamilton; she

advocated for independence on the international stage; and she reconvened the Scottish Parliament. That is an honour that no one else will ever have. I hope that we can also take this time to remind ourselves that this place has to go on to achieve everything that was hoped for in the very first session.

Winnie Ewing has undoubtedly left her mark on the political landscape. She represented in politics at a time when it was unusual, to say the least, to see women taking a prominent role. That is a reminder to us that we need to continue to value women in politics and help all of us to bring everything that we can to the job.

We have to recognise the unique situation that we are in with both Fergus and Annabelle here as sitting members. Winnie Ewing's loss to the party and the independence movement is obvious, but the loss to her family is profound. Finding the words to express that loss and convey how sorry I truly am is almost impossible. The gravity of grief, let alone having to navigate that grief in the public eye, is great, and it takes a great deal of strength to be able to sit through such a session. I hope that the outpouring of feeling and the formal marking of their mum's death bring Fergus and Annabelle some comfort. Grief is a process, and I hope that, long after this debate concludes, colleagues around the chamber will continue to provide a listening ear.

Winnie Ewing achieved what many of us hope to do in our lifetimes. She has a tangible legacy written into the history books, with people who love her to continue to tell her stories—the triumphant ones of winning elections and, undoubtedly, the deeply personal ones of fun. Those are the things that paint the picture of a life well lived, and add colour and light when grief can weigh heavy.

I want to finish with a poem that was sent to me by a friend at my own time of loss. I hope that those across the chamber who feel Winnie's loss will find some comfort in it.

“Don't think of her as gone away, her journey's just begun,
Life holds so many facets, this earth is only one.
She's in a place of warmth and comfort where there are no days or years.

Think how she must be wishing that we could know today
How nothing but our sadness can really pass away,
And think of her as living in the hearts of those she touched,
For nothing loved is ever lost and she was loved so much.”

14:20

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): This is an afternoon of clear emotion, as we

have just seen in the moving words of Gillian Mackay. I, too, extend the heartfelt condolences of my party, the Liberal Democrats, to everyone in the chamber today who loved Winnie Ewing, not least her children Annabelle and Fergus. It is lovely to see that Annabelle's lectern is up and Fergus's pen is in his hand; I hope that we might get some contributions from them later.

I have been particularly moved by what we have heard today, especially by the laughter. It is a testimony to the woman that the chamber has been filled with laughter on what would otherwise be a solemn occasion. I did not know Winnie—I think that I met her when I was a lobbyist—but it is impossible not to have been taken by her formidable reputation.

I have said several times that it is incumbent on all of us who are elected to the chamber to reflect the better natures of the people that we are here to serve. Winnie Ewing did so, and with aplomb. On news of her passing, my Scottish Liberal Democrat colleague Alistair Carmichael said that Winnie was renowned for her fierce determination, which was amply matched by her sense of fun. In his words, that meant that even those people who disagreed with her held her in respect and admiration. From what we have heard today, that was clearly true.

Her mark on Scottish politics is as indelible as the legacy that it leaves. Presiding Officer, you referenced the fact that she was the first person to speak in Parliament when it was reconvened after 300 years. Her portrait rightly hangs near the entrance to the chamber, because it is in part due to her efforts and tireless campaigning that the Scottish Parliament sits here today.

The famous 1967 by-election victory in Hamilton was groundbreaking in many ways, but what strikes me as we reflect on it is how undoubtedly important it was in paving the way for many more women from all parties and of all political stripes in the chamber and beyond, both to be inspired and to go out and get elected.

In her time as a member of the British delegation to the fledgling European Parliament and in her tenure as an MEP, it was her commitment and passion that helped to forge lasting strong ties between Scotland and Europe. As we have heard, she is one of the few people to have served in all three—as we had previously—of our Parliaments, which is testament to her ardent commitment to public service; it is then no wonder that two of her children followed her footsteps into Scottish politics and have made such a valuable contribution in her stead and in her shadow. However, they have grown beyond that shadow to make their own contribution as well.

All those achievements highlight a career that many of us, regardless of our political side or stripes, look up to and aspire to emulate. Although a lot of her politics were clearly at odds with mine and my party's, I admire her greatly; in fact, it is difficult not to do so. She will be remembered as a stalwart and trailblazer, and for her passion, drive and perseverance, all of which will have lasting impacts on our society, far beyond her passing.

14:23

Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP): It is an honour to be called to contribute to the debate on the motion of condolence for my mother, Winnie Ewing. I wish to thank the First Minister and all the other speakers for their kind and thoughtful words today; indeed, the family has been touched and supported by the condolences that we have received from across the chamber, Scotland and further afield.

From my mother's sensational victory in November 1967 in the Hamilton by-election to her unseating the Secretary of State for Scotland in Moray and Nairn in the February 1974 election; from her victory in the first directly elected European Parliament elections for the Highlands and Islands in 1979 to her holding that seat in three more elections with vastly increased majorities; from her winning her Highlands and Islands seat as a member of this Parliament to her historic words in formally reconvening it, this long track record of electoral success—very much against the odds—was not down to luck but, rather, was a result of how my mother was able to inspire people. For she was not just clever, kind and generous, and she was not only stylish and charismatic; Winnie walked in other people's shoes, and they knew that she would speak up for them.

Winnie transformed political campaigning. She spoke directly to people in their factories and homes and on the streets. Indeed, it is not an exaggeration to say that, during the Hamilton by-election campaign, by the sheer power of her personality, she created a new mood of optimism both in Hamilton and across Scotland. Winnie inspired people to imagine how things could be in a normal independent country, with transformative powers to create a fairer society and to participate in the world directly, taking our seat in the United Nations between Saudi Arabia and Senegal.

The early Westminster years were tough for my mother as the sole SNP MP in a House of Commons of 630 members. There was, it has to be said, a great deal of hostility, much of it involving outright misogyny. When my mother was elected in 1967, having been encouraged to stand by my late father, we kids were all under 11, with my younger brother Terry just three-and-a-half

years old. My mum was often met, on arriving home on a Thursday night—frequently exhausted—with a rather disgruntled wee boy running to the door, where Terry posed two crushing questions: “Where you been? Why you went?” I am sure that that plaintive cry strikes a chord with many colleagues across the chamber. I am pleased to report that my wee brother Terry’s grammar has improved massively over the years. [Laughter.]

It is simply beyond doubt that Winnie blazed a trail for women. She was far ahead of her time. She set up her own legal practice at 28 and became a respected and busy Glasgow criminal defence lawyer. She then became secretary of the Glasgow Bar Association and she was also president of the Soroptimist International club of Glasgow central. Winnie demonstrated that a woman’s place was wherever she chose it to be, including in politics. What is perhaps less well known is that Winnie personally inspired many women to stand for election, some of whom I see in the chamber today. Winnie was a champion of women’s rights. A friend with different political views said in her condolence card to me:

“All women in Scotland, I am sure, are proud of Winnie and what she did for us.”

A lifelong campaigner for human rights and oppressed minorities, Winnie was also a good friend to the Jewish community in Scotland, working with fellow Glasgow solicitor and friend Leslie Wolfson to free prisoners of conscience from the Soviet Union. In her 24 years as a Member of the European Parliament, Winnie was steadfast in standing up for our fishermen and fishing communities. She always spoke up for the Scottish interest. She was a champion of the Gaelic language and she did, indeed, earn the sobriquet Madame Écosse.

She worked with MEPs from other political groups and made common cause in getting things done that would benefit Scotland and Europe more generally. We can indeed see that in her work to get the Erasmus scheme up and running when she was chair of the European Parliament’s Education and Culture Committee, and we can also see that in her bringing the Lomé assembly to Inverness. We can also see that recognition in her being awarded the Médaille d’Or du Mérite européen, further to a presentation by the then European Commission President, Jean-Claude Juncker, in November 2014 in Luxembourg.

When my mother reconvened the Scottish Parliament on 12 May 1999, she said in her contribution from the chair that she had four practical hopes for the Parliament: that we strive to adopt a more consensual style—which is perhaps a work in progress—that we be fair in our procedures to minorities; that the very existence of

the Parliament lead to better relations with our neighbours across the isles; and that we live in harmony together, both those who were born here and those who have chosen to make Scotland their home.

I imagine that my mother would not mind me adding here—indeed, I expect that she would be a bit disappointed if I did not—that her hopes for our party would be that we remain a national party that speaks up for all parts of Scotland, that we never take any vote for granted and that we continue to seek to persuade our fellow citizens of the opportunities of independence by reasoned and courteous debate.

It would be wrong for me not to mention just how much our father, Stewart, devoted his life to provide support for Winnie, without which she simply would not have been able to do all the things that she did. She helped my father, Stewart, in his bid to become a Glasgow councillor in the 1970s. At a Saturday night pub canvass in Maryhill, she introduced a rather reluctant Stewart—as many here will know, he was not quite as gregarious as my mum, it is fair to say—to a group of ladies who were having a very good night out in the pub in Maryhill. She introduced my dad with the words,

“Ladies, this is your council candidate and my husband, Stewart”,

to which there was a bit of silence—a bit of a pause—and then the deadpan reply came,

“Winnie, are you boasting or apologising?”

Winnie was a trailblazer for women. She was a legend in her own lifetime, a heroine and a patriot but, for the family, she was also our mum. Fergus, Terry and I are inordinately proud of her. [Applause.]

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. We will take a minute or two before we resume proceedings.

Portfolio Question Time

Net Zero and Just Transition

14:33

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is portfolio questions on net zero and just transition. I remind members wishing to ask a supplementary question to press the request-to-speak buttons during the relevant question. I also remind members of the time allocations for questions and, indeed, responses.

Decarbonisation of Buildings (Assistance Schemes)

1. **Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on progress towards the decarbonisation of buildings and the schemes of assistance that are available to the public to help them make the transition. (S6O-02472)

The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights (Patrick Harvie): We will publish our annual update on progress against our heat and buildings strategy by the end of October. The update will include a summary of progress on our support schemes. The Scottish Government offers a range of support to households, including our warmer homes Scotland and area-based schemes, as well as the home energy Scotland grant and loan scheme, which is open to all domestic households in Scotland and provides the most generous grants in the United Kingdom for zero-direct-emissions heating systems.

Willie Coffey: I thank the minister for that update, which confirms that Scottish households have access to the most generous grant support in the UK when it comes to increasing the energy efficiency of their homes. Will the minister note that public awareness and participation is crucial if that record support is to be granted effectively amid rising costs? Does the minister agree that Scottish Government interventions are undermined by a UK Government that has failed to tackle sky-high energy prices or to support fuel-poor households in Scotland?

Patrick Harvie: Willie Coffey is absolutely right on the issue of public awareness. The public engagement strategy for Scotland will be led by the new heat and energy efficiency Scotland agency.

It is also vital that the UK Government publishes firm plans to rebalance fuel prices. That is necessary to ensure that climate-friendly heating

systems are cheaper to run than fossil fuel systems. We are pressing the UK Government for more urgent action to enable delivery in Scotland, to address market disincentives to switching to zero-emission heat, and to accelerate decision making on the potential role of hydrogen. We have clear ambitions to decarbonise buildings faster and we offer significantly more support for heat pumps and other zero-emission heating systems than other parts of the UK, but we cannot afford to delay taking action and the UK Government needs to match that ambition.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There are several supplementary questions and how many I get in will depend upon the brevity of questions and responses.

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): The Public Audit Committee heard this morning that we have no idea what it will cost to decarbonise buildings in Scotland. Does the minister accept that he and his Government need to set out what it is going to cost individual householders?

Patrick Harvie: We have a high-level estimate of the total cost of decarbonising heating in Scotland. It is clear that that cannot be met from public funds alone. We want to make sure that it is affordable for householders, communities and business and that will include using a blend of public support, as well as financial products, with a role for private investment and the energy industry, too. More detail will be set out as we move forward to consult on the heat in buildings strategy later this year.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): What lessons have been learned from the £133 million underspend last year on retrofitting homes to make them energy efficient and affordable to heat? My understanding is that a lack of trained staff was a key blockage across the country. Given the fact that fuel poverty is now hitting 39 per cent of our households, what is the Scottish Government doing to address this massive problem and to create jobs and training opportunities across Scotland?

Patrick Harvie: A range of factors influenced the uptake of voluntary demand-led schemes during Covid and in the wake of the cost of living crisis and the spike in energy prices. We need to take account of all those factors, including skills and capacity across the supply chain. Our supply chain delivery programme is working with industry to address those issues, and they will also be addressed in the consultation that we will carry out later this year.

Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): The overwhelming majority of my constituents live in properties that are not connected to the gas grid

and many are potentially unsuitable for heat pumps. What options will be available to those who rely on oil in that situation, and what financial support will be on offer?

Patrick Harvie: Our approach to reducing emissions from buildings is technology-neutral. However, we know that heat pumps are a proven technology and that they work efficiently when they are designed and installed correctly alongside the appropriate energy efficiency measures. Many rural households have already made the transition, and colder countries, such as Norway and Finland, that have large rural populations, are also far ahead of us in this.

However, we recognise that bioenergy might be the best option for a small number of buildings. We already provide an extra £1,500 on top of the £7,500 Home Energy Scotland heating and energy efficiency grants to cover the higher costs in rural areas. We have also recently announced an uplift for rural and remote areas in relation to the social housing net zero heat fund.

Strategic Transport Projects Review (A75)

2. Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the second strategic transport projects review in relation to improving the A75. (S6O-02473)

The Minister for Transport (Fiona Hyslop): The second strategic transport projects review will inform the Scottish Government's transport investment programme over the next 20 years. As detailed on page 41 of the review, there are clear recommendations for the A75.

In August, I met the leader of Dumfries and Galloway Council and the chair of the regional transport partnership, the South West of Scotland Transport Partnership, in Dumfries, where we discussed our shared ambition for the route and the next steps for the bypassing of the villages of Springholm and Crocketford. As we committed to in our programme for government this week, we will continue to press the United Kingdom Government to fulfil its commitment to fund and support the next steps for improvements on the A75, and we are awaiting a response to the invited bid that was issued to it in April. In fact, I am meeting the UK minister responsible, Richard Holden MP, next week to discuss that very issue.

Finlay Carson: In a television interview on "Representing Border" earlier this week, the First Minister gave a categorical assurance that the A75 and the A77 will get vital improvements. We have had such promises before. Indeed, in January this year, Michael Matheson said that the STPR2 timetable would be published in spring. However, with 38 out of the 45 recommendations either

started or completed, we are yet to hear when the A75 improvements will be rolled out.

I have previously welcomed the UK Government's constructive collaboration with the Scottish Government on the Euroroute, but given that transport is devolved, the failure to deliver on previous commitments lies squarely at the door of the Scottish National Party Government. Will the minister give my constituents an indicative start date for the Springholm and Crocketford bypasses that it has promised but failed to deliver?

Fiona Hyslop: As I said in my first answer, as the new Minister for Transport I have been active in engaging with the key stakeholders in Dumfries and Galloway Council and SWestrans, as well as with the UK Government. I have done that on the basis that the committed support from the UK Government must be resolved in order to commence work on some of the issues that we are talking about, if, as I think Mr Carson is calling for, we are to do that collectively with the UK Government, particularly in relation to the connections to Northern Ireland. I will continue my work on the issue in that spirit.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There are a couple of brief supplementaries. Again, brevity would be appreciated.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): When the UK Government published the Peter Hendy review, it committed to provide funding to the Scottish Government to improve the safety and efficiency of the A75. I agree that we need those upgrades urgently, but will the minister indicate whether the UK Government has provided any information on how much funding will be provided and when it will be received?

Fiona Hyslop: As called for by a number of people, not least Conservative MSPs, we are co-operating with the UK Government on that. I will meet the minister responsible, Richard Holden MP, on Monday, and I hope that we can agree a way forward and secure the amount of funding that it is seeking to provide.

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): The transport review was published in December—years late—and we were told that there would be a delivery plan by spring. Communities in Crocketford and Springholm do not want to hear two Governments bickering over who is going to pay for the bypasses—they want to see them happen. Will the minister give an indication of when she will tell Parliament exactly when work will commence on those communities' bypasses? They have been waiting years for an announcement from the Government.

Fiona Hyslop: If the member listened to my tone, he would hear that I am far from bickering. I look to work in co-operation with the leader of

Dumfries and Galloway Council, the SWestrans chair and the relevant MP. If people want us to work in a collective way, I will take that forward. However, in that relationship, we need to identify the steps that are required. As I said, how they can be delivered is actively being discussed. I will continue to work in that spirit, as I have committed to—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Carson, you had an opportunity to ask a question, so please stop shouting across the chamber.

Fiona Hyslop: If we want co-operation in delivering transport projects, perhaps the questions and the answers should reflect that.

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

Offshore Wind Power (Harbour Infrastructure)

4. **Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to support the development of the necessary harbour infrastructure, including in relation to the operations and maintenance support phase of offshore wind, to deliver a just transition to rural communities, such as Fraserburgh. (S6O-02475)

The Minister for Transport (Fiona Hyslop): Scotland's ports and harbours have various ownership models. Fraserburgh is a trust port that is run by the Fraserburgh Harbour Commissioners. The Scottish Government recognises the importance that ports and harbours infrastructure plays in delivering a just transition to coastal communities.

The Moray East operations and maintenance base in Fraserburgh has created around 100 local high-value skilled jobs, which will bring economic opportunities as we work towards achieving our net zero ambitions. The strategic investment model will further assist in identifying shared priorities, with an initial focus on investment in ports and harbours, infrastructure improvements, manufacturing and fabrication.

Karen Adam: My constituency of Banffshire and Buchan Coast has a huge part to play in Scotland's net zero ambitions. I thank the Scottish Government for its unrelenting support for the Acorn project at St Fergus and the Moray offshore wind projects and its funding of the Campaign for North East Rail's feasibility study on bringing rail back to Peterhead and Fraserburgh.

The Fraserburgh harbour master plan has a huge part to play in our net zero goals. Will the minister meet with me and the harbour board to discuss its ambitious plan?

Fiona Hyslop: The Scottish Government recognises the crucial role that the north-east

plays in working towards achieving the net zero ambitions. We have been urging the United Kingdom Government to commit to carbon capture and storage in Scotland for well over a decade. Its recent, long overdue decision to begin its due diligence and hold discussions with Acorn recognises the importance of the potential of the Acorn project and the Scottish cluster.

The Campaign for North East Rail is passionate about its railways. Its award of up to £250,000 from the last just transition fund to conduct a multi-modal study of transport options is also a step forward. Transport Scotland officials continue to work with the relevant bodies, and they attended the Fraserburgh Harbour Commissioners board meeting on 20 September to discuss its ambitious plans. I would be happy to meet with the member to discuss any outcomes from that meeting if that would be of interest.

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): To unlock the benefits of harbour improvements at Fraserburgh, it is vital that road infrastructure to Fraserburgh is also improved. Last week, six people were taken to hospital after a car accident at Cortes junction, and we have all heard of the many incidents at the notorious Toll of Birness.

Can I ask the minister how many more lives will have to be impacted before the Government will sort out the dangerous route to Fraserburgh? Without that happening, a just transition will never be delivered.

Fiona Hyslop: I reflect on my remarks about the £250,000 for the multimodal transport study. Clearly, infrastructure for access to harbours affects residents, as has been referred to. Given the growth of support for the offshore industry, we should also be looking at the different issues around freight and so on. I certainly will ask my officials to look at the particular issue that the member has raised in relation to those accidents, and I will reply to him when there is something additional that I can provide to give him some reassurance.

Offshore Training Passport

5. **Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what progress has been made on the development of an offshore training passport, as funded by the just transition fund. (S6O-02476)

The Minister for Small Business, Innovation, Tourism and Trade (Richard Lochhead): The Scottish Government strongly supports delivery of a skills passport that will work for the different offshore energy industry sectors, as we recognise the cross-sector skills of workers and the

importance of supporting a fair and managed transition.

Since the development of our prototype skills passport in 2022, work has been on-going to test and finalise the technical aspects of the passport. Alongside technical developments, project partners in renewables, oil and gas, as well as trade unions, have been working hard to increase cross-sector collaboration on the development of the passport, including by seeking agreement on mutual recognition of training requirements across sectors.

Mercedes Villalba: The passport is due to be rolled out later this month, but offshore trade unions—in particular, the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers—remain concerned that their members will end up continuing to pay a price if their qualifications are not recognised by developers and contractors in the offshore wind sector. Will the minister guarantee that all developers of wind farms that are leased through ScotWind will be required to recognise the passport? Will he commit to working with the trade unions on implementing the passport when it is finally launched?

Richard Lochhead: Of course, I will commit to working with the trade unions to implement the passport once it is finalised. We are talking about a major exercise that will benefit the sector for very many years to come. The passport involves close collaboration between the energy industry, its workforce, Governments and their agencies, trade unions, trade bodies, skills bodies and education and training providers. It is important that we get this right and that all parts of the industry get behind it.

As I say, as we look toward the energy transition of the next 10 or 20 years, it is important that we get this right and that we get it in place in a proper way.

Renewable Heating Systems in Homes

6. Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its target for renewable heating systems in homes. (S6O-02477)

The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights (Patrick Harvie): More than 1 million homes must convert to zero-emissions heating by 2030 if we are to meet Parliament's interim climate targets. We have developed regulations to deliver that in all new buildings. We have also introduced a new Home Energy Scotland grant, and shortly we will relaunch the warmer homes Scotland programme. As I mentioned in response to an earlier question, we will also be consulting soon on proposals for a heat in buildings bill.

Martin Whitfield: Over the recess, I had the pleasure of visiting Sunamp in Tranent, in East Lothian. Sunamp is a fantastic and growing company that makes heat storage systems for individual domestic use and local housing associations. I know that the minister is aware of the company. What lessons can the Scottish Government learn from that fantastic East Lothian-based company on the importance of heat storage in tackling poverty and meeting net zero commitments?

Patrick Harvie: I and a number of other ministers have visited that particular company and been impressed by its work. I am pleased to hear that there is cross-party support for that and recognition of the important role that heat storage and electrical storage will play in the future of a decarbonised and renewable energy grid. Martin Whitfield is quite right that it will also have an important role to play in the jobs benefit that will come from the decarbonisation of heat. We believe that many thousands of jobs and high-quality careers are to be had from that programme of work, which will benefit communities the length and breadth of the country.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There is a bit of interest in this issue. I will try to get all the supplementary questions in, but they will need to be brief.

Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP): District heating systems can offer a number of advantages in decarbonising heating in existing—as well as new—properties, potentially providing a low-cost effective solution that enables access to a heat source that is not available to individual households. What work is the Scottish Government taking forward to accelerate the roll-out of district heating networks in existing properties?

Patrick Harvie: This is another hugely important aspect of the agenda. The Parliament passed the Heat Networks (Scotland) Act 2021 in the previous parliamentary session, and we are implementing that legislation. Public bodies are under a new duty to assess whether their estate would be suitable to connect to district heating systems, and local authorities have powers to identify areas that are suited to district heating. We are exploring the potential for further legislation to strongly encourage buildings to connect to heat networks. Meanwhile, district heating projects in Scotland can receive pre-development support from our Heat Network Support Unit and grant and loan funding from Scotland's £300 million heat network fund or our district heating loan fund.

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests. I am a private landlord, as well as the owner of my own house.

Renewable heating targets are important. When the Government is considering them, will it publish the estimated cost to the public purse of upgrading renewable heating in the public housing stock?

Patrick Harvie: I am not entirely sure what Edward Mountain is referring to as “the public housing stock” and whether he is talking about council housing or social housing. We have a substantial social housing net zero heat fund, which he is aware of. We work with local authorities as well as housing associations and other social housing providers. In fact, this is part of the wider heat in buildings programme, and the overall high-level costs that I referred to earlier have been published and put into the public domain.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): The minister will be well aware of the Queens Quay district heat network in Clydebanks, which is the biggest in the United Kingdom and was pioneered by the Glasgow-based engineering company Star Refrigeration. The company is saying that scaling that across the Clyde corridor, with the potential to take hundreds of thousands of homes and businesses off the gas grid, is constrained by access to affordable electricity. What is the minister doing to unlock that opportunity for affordable electricity supply along the Clyde and to get that density of commitments through the planning obligations? Together, that would unlock the huge potential—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Minister, as briefly as possible.

Patrick Harvie: We engage actively with both Star Refrigeration, which is showing the jobs potential for manufacturing in relation to the decarbonisation of heat, and the Queens Quay development. I hope that all members will encourage local authorities, public bodies and housing associations to access the support for heat networks that I referred to earlier.

The issues around the affordability of electricity supply come back to the regulatory power that currently sits at UK level. If we are to decouple gas and electricity prices, we need the UK Government to act. That would enable us to pass on the benefit of the cheap, abundant, clean and green renewable electricity that is being generated in this country to benefit bill payers.

Skills Development Scotland and Built Environment—Smarter Transformation (Partnership)

7. **Bob Doris:** To ask the Scottish Government how its action to achieve net zero will be supported by the recently agreed partnership between Skills Development Scotland and Built

Environment—Smarter Transformation. (S6O-02478)

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Net Zero and Just Transition (Màiri McAllan): The construction sector is critical to achieving a just transition to net zero, and the Scottish Government is supporting a range of plans for a more sustainable, innovative and diverse construction industry.

The new strategic partnership that Bob Doris has referred to will allow Built Environment—Smarter Transformation and Skills Development Scotland to collaborate and identify ways in which the construction industry can help the sector to address its net zero challenges.

Bob Doris: As we navigate the economic changes that will accompany our transition to a net zero society, apprentices with the skills and knowledge to transform sectors such as construction will be crucial to Scotland’s drive towards net zero. What role does the cabinet secretary see apprentices playing on that journey?

Màiri McAllan: Apprenticeships are a critical tool for employers and a critical way for them to invest in their workforce and provide the skills that are needed to support the imperative of transitioning to net zero. They are vital for supporting young people into valuable and rewarding careers and helping people to upskill, reskill and progress in their chosen careers. Statistics published by Skills Development Scotland show that, in 2022-23, construction operations had the largest number of overall starts, at 26 per cent. We will continue to work collaboratively to maintain and to boost that number.

A9 (Prevention of Deaths)

8. **Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it has conducted any analysis of how many deaths on the A9 could have been prevented if it had been fully dualled. (S6O-02479)

The Minister for Transport (Fiona Hyslop): One death on our roads is one too many, and the tragic fatal accidents that have been recorded on the A9 in 2022 and 2023 have occurred on dual and single carriageway sections. There will be families who are grieving, as there will be for all deaths on our roads. An assessment of potential future reductions in fatalities as a result of dualling the whole length of the A9 has not been made.

However, the 2016 “Case for Investment” report on the A9 dualling programme between Perth and Inverness forecasted that there would be approximately six fewer fatalities annually following dualling. That comparison is with performance prior to the introduction of average-

speed cameras, following which there has been an average reduction of three deaths annually compared with the baseline. That assessment will be updated as part of the work to consider the optimal approach for completion of the A9 dualling programme.

Sandesh Gulhane: The minister is right—deaths have occurred on the A9 on dual and single carriageway sections of the road. However, over the past five years, the number of deaths that have occurred on single carriageway sections of the A9 outnumber the number of deaths on dual carriageway sections by 20 to one. On such an important route, dual carriageways are much safer.

Will the cabinet secretary be specific in Parliament and provide a timetable for the full dualling of the A9? If she is unable to provide that now, will she commit to providing me with a written response this month?

Fiona Hyslop: I am responding as the Minister for Transport.

On Tuesday, the First Minister announced that the contract notice for the dualling of the Tomatin to Moy section has been issued and reaffirmed the Government's commitment to full dualling of the A9. I would have thought that the member would have wanted to welcome that.

The Scottish Government will provide more detail, including detail on the timelines for full dualling, in the autumn, as planned, as was announced several times before the summer recess in the chamber to those MSPs who were present.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: A lot of members have supplementaries. I will not be able to fit them all in, but I will fit in as many as I can.

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): The First Minister has reaffirmed his cast-iron commitment to the folk of the Highlands, and the Scottish National Party has a record of delivering infrastructure projects for Scotland that the Scottish Government will continue to deliver on.

The cost of dualling the Tomatin to Moy section has risen from £115 million to £150 million. What impact is the inflation that was caused by the Tories' economic negligence and cuts to Scotland's capital budget having on the Government's ability to deliver on such projects?

Fiona Hyslop: The member makes an important point. The first point to make is that we are going to dual the A9.

Members: When?

Fiona Hyslop: I am not sure whether to respond to the member who asked the question or to those members who are heckling.

In response to Jackie Dunbar's question, there is significant pressure on the Scottish Government's capital budgets, not least because of the economic mismanagement that there has been over recent times. Inflation has had a considerable impact on construction costs. The fact that our budget has not had an uplift for inflation has meant that there has been a 7 per cent cut in our capital budget. Despite that, the First Minister has made a commitment in the programme for government that we will dual the A9.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you. We have no more time and need to move on to the next item of business.

Professor Sam Eljamel (Update)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a ministerial statement by Michael Matheson updating—

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

I apologise for asking the indulgence of members. Rule 13.2 of our standing orders deals with ministerial statements and section 3.5 of the Scottish ministerial code states that

“Ministers should ensure that important announcements of Government policy are made, in the first instance, to the Parliament”.

During First Minister’s questions today, we heard confirmation of the very positive news that there will be an inquiry into the incidents that the ministerial statement will deal with. However, that news was available in nationally published newspapers yesterday and the First Minister confirmed today that the inquiry was discussed at a Cabinet meeting earlier this week.

I am disappointed that, once again, information has been put into the public domain before being announced to this Parliament. In this particular case, the surgeon’s victims should have had the right to hear a full and proper statement explaining what is happening, rather than a snapshot through news headlines, which is disrespectful to them and to this chamber. I seek your guidance, Deputy Presiding Officer, on what can be done about the matter.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I thank Martin Whitfield for prior notice of his point of order. As he says, the guidance on announcements is intended to ensure that important matters do not enter the public domain before, or without, being communicated to Parliament. I invite the Government to reflect on Mr Whitfield’s concern that information suggesting that there will be a public inquiry into the case of Professor Eljamel appears to have been reported in the media prior to the First Minister’s announcement in the chamber earlier today.

Having said that, I will move on—

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): On a point of order, Deputy Presiding Officer.

Given the fact that we all know what is in the statement, would it not be in order for us to proceed straight to questions?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I thank Mr Kerr—*[Interruption.]* Members, please allow me to respond to the point of order rather than taking it upon yourselves to do so.

As far as I am aware, the detail of what is in the statement has not been put in the public domain and it would not therefore serve any useful purpose to go straight to questions.

I invite Michael Matheson to provide a statement giving an update on Professor Eljamel, who worked for NHS Tayside. The cabinet secretary will take questions afterwards on the issues that are raised in his statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

15:02

The Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care (Michael Matheson): Few things are more important than the safety of patients in our health service. Perhaps equally critical is the trust that we—as individuals and communities—can have in our healthcare. Patients must also trust that any concerns that are raised about their care and treatment will be investigated and that the necessary actions will be taken. They must be able to trust that their concerns will be investigated and scrutinised and will be subject to robust governance and due diligence at the time, not several years later.

When trust is broken and weakness in governance is identified, it is imperative that we do all that we can to investigate why that has happened and to prevent others having the same kinds of distressing and traumatic experiences.

Actions some years ago by Mr Eljamel, a former surgeon in NHS Tayside, have been discussed at length in this chamber and I know that colleagues have a keen interest in the Government’s next steps.

Several reviews into his practice have taken place—both at the time and in the years since—after concerns were expressed by a number of his former patients. The latest NHS Tayside review—a due diligence review of documentation held relating to Professor Eljamel—laid bare the failings in NHS Tayside’s response to concerns about Mr Eljamel. It is clear from that review that those concerns were not acted upon or followed up with the urgency and rigour that they deserved.

Now, several years later, many former patients still live with the consequences and still have many unanswered questions. That is why I am today announcing our intention to commission a full public inquiry to seek answers to those questions.

Mr Eljamel practised as a consultant neurosurgeon at NHS Tayside between 1995 and 2013. Concerns about his practice were first raised with NHS Tayside in 2011 and 2012. As a result of a complaint that was received at the end of 2012, two further complaints received in 2013

and two significant clinical event analyses, NHS Tayside commissioned the Royal College of Surgeons in England to review his practice. Most complaints were received after Mr Eljamel had been suspended in 2013. Since then, several reviews have taken place into his practice.

Members will know that one of my predecessors as health secretary, Jeane Freeman, commissioned in March 2021 an independent case note review on the outstanding concerns of two former patients. That reported in May 2022, and it made several recommendations for NHS Tayside, the Scottish Government and NHS Scotland. In response, NHS Tayside commissioned the due diligence review in March this year, and that was considered by the board on Thursday 31 August 2023. I will say more about the detail of that review in a moment.

In the months when that work was undertaken, several former patients continued to raise concerns about their prior care and treatment. That was done directly with NHS Tayside, through MSPs, with ministers and in the media. I have considered the concerns that were raised with me by several former patients, and I was struck by their bravery and persistence—which was sometimes accompanied by significant distress and compounded trauma.

Nevertheless, at first, I was not persuaded of their argument that only a public inquiry would find the answers they sought about what happened to them and why. Knowing the length of time that that could take, and knowing that it would not necessarily consider individual patient's circumstances, I was of the view that there were other, potentially faster and more individually responsive, ways to seek the answers that they are looking for.

However—as I have already touched on—after considering the findings of the due diligence review, my view has significantly changed. I will offer some detail on the due diligence review process and what specifically it has found that informed my thinking. Earlier this year, NHS Tayside began to examine its handling of those concerns. Last Thursday, its board considered the report. It outlines a number of failings that I believe can only be examined thoroughly by a full public inquiry. It also raises significant information that was not previously known to the Scottish Government, and given the length of time since the first concerns were raised about Mr Eljamel, that raises real concerns.

Briefly, the due diligence review identified that NHS Tayside did not respond to the General Medical Council about Mr Eljamel's request for voluntary erasure from the medical register. It also identified that there was no effective central board oversight or co-ordination of significant historical

information or reviews into concerns. It identified multiple examples of reviews and investigations where there was no follow-up action recorded and no or inadequate scrutiny, assurance or supporting governance. It identified cases where—despite there being complaints, adverse event reports and legal claims—no formal review of cases have been documented or retained, and that documents of potential relevance were subject to destruction in accordance with routine retention periods when putting a hold on such destruction would have better supported subsequent review processes. It identified adverse events where no investigation can be identified and no reports of adverse events were formally recorded until several months after the incidents, and that communication and support for former patients was not consistently of the required standard.

I have reflected on the concerns of former patients and MSPs since the findings were considered by the board of NHS Tayside, and I am clear that the board's governance obligations were repeatedly not implemented in relation to concerns about Mr Eljamel. I consider that that now means that the commissioning of a full public inquiry, under the terms of the Inquiries Act 2005, with the powers to compel witnesses, is the only route to get to the bottom of who knew what and when, and what contributed to the failures that have been described by NHS Tayside. Inevitably, that will be a lengthy process and, as I said earlier, a full public inquiry will not necessarily answer each former patient's clinical questions about their own circumstances.

For that reason, I still consider that an independent case review of patients' individual clinical cases—where that is what individual patients want—remains necessary. That will allow a person-centred and trauma-informed review of each patient's clinical case, addressing their individual needs and circumstances and attempting to offer answers in a bespoke and personalised way that an inquiry will not offer.

Former patients live each day with the consequences of their treatment by Mr Eljamel. Addressing their personal needs in an individual clinical review that is conducted independently of NHS Tayside remains an important part of that process. I want that to begin as soon as possible and not to be delayed by the announcement of our intention to commission a public inquiry.

For the sake of those patients who are directly affected, for the confidence of the community in Tayside and for the promotion of patient safety more broadly across Scotland, I believe that a full public inquiry is needed. I have asked my officials to begin to make the necessary arrangements and

I will continue to update the Parliament as those progress.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary will take questions on issues that have been raised in his statement. I intend to allow around 20 minutes for that, after which we will need to move on to the next item of business. We are quite tight for time. I invite members who wish to ask a question to press their request-to-speak button, if they have not already done so.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): For the past 10 years in this Parliament, I have listened to some of the most harrowing stories that I have ever heard—of intense and permanent medical and psychological pain, of families being broken apart, and of heart-rending accounts of victims' attempts to get to the truth only to be knocked back at every turn. This cabinet secretary has finally accepted that the only way to get to that truth is to commission a full independent inquiry.

As do the former patients who deserve so much credit for their relentless campaigning—most especially, Mrs Jules Rose and Mr Pat Kelly—I very much welcome that change of heart, but I will ask the cabinet secretary three things. First, to add to the apologies that have, rightly, been made to individual patients for the harm that they have suffered, will the cabinet secretary also apologise, on behalf of successive cabinet secretaries for health, for the process having taken so many years, thereby prolonging the agony for the victims of Eljamel?

Secondly, does the cabinet secretary accept that there has been an utter failure on the part not only of NHS Tayside, as he has described, but on the parts of the other health agencies to address serial complaints that were made about people in management who knew exactly what was going on but chose to keep quiet?

Thirdly, in February 2013, as complaints mounted, neurosurgeons at Ninewells complained to the Royal College of Surgeons that their workload was too great and that, as a result of what they said were “external pressures”, they were forced to take on extra patients from Fife to try to cut waiting times. Can the cabinet secretary confirm whether that external pressure to take on extra patients came from the Scottish Government?

Michael Matheson: I put on record my recognition of Liz Smith's long-standing interest in pursuing the issue on behalf of her constituents. I recognise the significant impact that Mr Eljamel's actions have had on the physical and mental wellbeing of individual patients.

On the specific points that Liz Smith raised, I deeply regret that we are in a situation in which we even require a public inquiry for such a matter.

That is why I have reflected on the circumstances and have come to the view—she will be aware of my previous views on the matter—that a full public inquiry is now required. I was particularly concerned that, despite eight different reviews having taken place over an extended period, we were still in a situation in which the Scottish Government was learning new information from the health board, which is an unacceptable state of affairs. That is why I have come to the view that we need a full and detailed public inquiry.

The other specific points that Liz Smith made about other agencies and issues around workload will be considered by the public inquiry. At the end of that process, I hope that we will have greater understanding of who made what decisions and when, and the impact that they had on delivery of services in NHS Tayside at that time.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Let me welcome the announcement of a public inquiry. A week ago, the Scottish Government was not minded to grant the inquiry, so this U-turn is a tribute to the efforts of all the campaigners. I am very clear that the health board and Scottish ministers have failed in their duty to the people of Tayside and to the patients who were operated on by Sam Eljamel.

As I understand it, the issue was formally considered by the health board in February 2014, despite concerns having been raised well before that. What followed was a litany of reviews and action plans, but little action.

Will the cabinet secretary put in place an oversight board for NHS Tayside, given the failures in governance that he has acknowledged today? Will he tell us when Scottish ministers were first alerted to the problem? Although the issues may, indeed, be new to him, they were not new to Shona Robison, the former health secretary, who refused an inquiry; to Jeane Freeman, who initiated a case review; or to Humza Yousaf, who followed, and who also said no to a public inquiry.

Finally, let me welcome the independent case review and ask the cabinet secretary whether he will ensure that patients who have been affected are supported through the process and consulted on the terms of the inquiry?

Michael Matheson: Jackie Baillie will be aware that work is on-going with NHS Tayside in relation to the recommendations that came from the Scottish Government review back in 2022. That work, and oversight of it, is being taken forward by the Scottish Government, with NHS Tayside reporting to Scottish Government officials on the progress that it is making against the recommendations. There is continued oversight to make sure that it is making progress on the recommendations.

On Jackie Baillie's question about the terms of reference, those can be determined only once we have a chair appointed for the public inquiry. I am very clear about the need for affected patients to be able to feed into the process of setting the terms of reference for the inquiry. I will take that up with the chair, once they are appointed.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): As we know, the Scottish Government has previously committed to establishing an independent commission that could engage directly with former patients in order to seek answers as quickly as possible. I am pleased that that will continue. Can the cabinet secretary say any more about how that can complement the very welcome steps that have been set out by the Scottish Government today?

Michael Matheson: Since I came into this post, I have always been very clear, when considering this issue, that it is about how we create a process that helps to give affected patients answers to their unanswered questions. I have always been keen to ensure that whatever approach we take ensures that patients and their interests are at the very heart of the process.

We want to ensure that, alongside the public inquiry, we have a person-centred and trauma-informed process that allows former patients of Mr Eljamel the opportunity to have a full clinical review, if they wish to have one, and for that to be carried out independent of NHS Tayside. I have already commissioned our national clinical director to take forward that work. We are currently going through the process of identifying a lead clinician who could take that work forward for us.

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): I welcome the public inquiry, for which all the people whom I met who were protesting outside Parliament were asking. It is clear that, across our NHS, senior hospital managers are increasingly interfering with delivery of good-quality clinical care. Complaints of substandard and dangerous practices are being ignored, whistleblowers are subjected to bullying and intimidation, and lessons are not being learned.

Does the Scottish Government agree that NHS managers should be regulated, as doctors and nurses are, by an independent body with the legal purpose of protecting, promoting and maintaining the health and safety of the public? Given the need for urgency, I would be happy, rather than pursuing my member's bill, to work with the Scottish Government to take that forward.

I declare an interest as a practising NHS general practitioner.

Michael Matheson: Sandesh Gulhane will be aware that there is a full public inquiry taking place in England in relation to the Lucy Letby case. It is

looking at issues relating to that case, which might result in recommendations on regulation of managers in our national health service. We have already engaged with the Department of Health and Social Care on that, and I am very open to it as an option as we move forward, but I think that we should first allow the inquiry to take forward its work.

I say gently to Sandesh Gulhane, however, that this is about more than just managers in NHS Tayside—it is also about the conduct of clinicians in NHS Tayside, and the process by which and the way in which they have worked, which has had an impact on patients having experienced the outcomes that they have experienced. We must be mindful that this is not just about managers—it is also about the behaviour of clinicians, which is why we need a full public inquiry into the matter.

Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP): I very much welcome the Scottish Government's decision to pursue a public inquiry, but it should never be forgotten that the situation has resulted solely from the behaviour of Eljamel himself. In the light of the horrendous effects that Eljamel has caused through his malpractice, can the cabinet secretary advise what steps can be taken to compel him to appear before the inquiry?

Michael Matheson: I am sure that colleagues in the chamber will be aware that there is currently a live police investigation into the harm that has been caused to patients who were treated by Mr Eljamel. It is live, and I know that the Crown Office has already engaged in the process, so I will not comment any further on that.

The Inquiries Act 2005 gives powers to compel the appearance of both documentation and individuals before the inquiry. However, my understanding is that Mr Eljamel is outwith Scottish and UK jurisdictions, so that would depend on his being willing and prepared to return. That would be for the inquiry to pursue. However, the inquiry will have powers to compel witnesses and documentation in considering what information it needs in order to carry out a thorough investigation.

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): The cabinet secretary's assessment today of NHS Tayside's response in this regard is devastating. There are a plethora of recommendations across multiple reviews—I count eight in the most recent report—that have not been responded to.

I can confirm to the cabinet secretary that at the meeting of the NHS Tayside board last week, no board member raised the fact that there has been such neglect regarding the implementation of existing recommendations. How can we, as people who live in Dundee and Tayside, have faith that those recommendations will be put in place?

We need that oversight—will the cabinet secretary consider putting it in place?

Michael Matheson: The member is correct—since 2013, eight reviews have been taken forward in relation to this matter. That is why, when the due diligence report was published last week, and when I saw details of that, which resulted in new information being presented of which we were not previously aware, it raised serious concerns for me about the openness and transparency of the process within NHS Tayside to date.

I mention to the member the recommendations that came from the review that was carried out in 2022. There is oversight by the Scottish Government of the action plan that is being implemented by NHS Tayside on those matters.

Although I accept the underlying issue that the member has raised, it is important, in order to ensure that those actions are progressed, that we get to a point at which people have faith and trust in their local health board. I want to ensure that we look at what further actions we can take in order to establish that, going forward.

I do not want to delay anything in a way that would undermine the process of trying to get answers for patients and getting the public inquiry up and running as quickly as we reasonably can, but I will continue to look at what further measures are necessary in order to ensure that there is sufficient scrutiny of NHS Tayside.

Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP): We know that many former patients have expressed concerns about how their trust in NHS Tayside has been harmed as a result of this case. Can the cabinet secretary say any more about how the steps that have been outlined by the Scottish Government today can help to rebuild that public trust?

Michael Matheson: One of the things that I think is important in recognising the findings of this review is that the medical director in NHS Tayside has, I believe, carried out a very thorough investigation exposing key aspects of where the organisation has failed. I think that that in itself is a significant step by the health board towards being prepared to face up to its failings and to accept the consequences that go alongside that.

As I mentioned earlier, I will continue to consider whether we need to put in place any further measures to ensure that NHS Tayside continues to make progress that will help to engender confidence in the health board's conduct in dealing with this issue.

As I mentioned, it is important that we focus on making sure that we get the clinical review process in place for individual patients and that we

continue to make progress on getting the public inquiry established.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): The cabinet secretary has made the right decision today. I think that the twin-track approach is the right one, but I am afraid that it has taken far too long to get to this point. The patients have suffered throughout the period physically and, as the cabinet secretary noted, mentally. They have also got more angry as time has gone on, and the faith and trust that the cabinet secretary refers to has completely broken down.

I hope that all those who know relevant information come forward now and that, now that they know that they are potentially going to be compelled to participate in the inquiry, they release that information, so that patients can have some comfort right now that they can know more about their cases and their suffering. Will the cabinet secretary support that?

Michael Matheson: Yes, I will. It is also important that we use this as an opportunity to try to learn for the rest of NHS Scotland. I want to avoid finding ourselves in a situation where something similar could happen in another health board area. We need to ensure that the safeguards that we have in place, which have changed since the time when Mr Eljamel was a surgeon in NHS Tayside, are sufficient and robust, but we also need to ensure that we learn from what has happened, so that this type of incident cannot happen again. That is one of the key reasons why I believe that it is now right for us to have a full public inquiry, with the full engagement of all of those parties who have relevant information. I would encourage them to disclose that information now and to fully co-operate with the public inquiry once it is established.

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): We cannot overestimate the importance of listening to the voices of former patients. Can the cabinet secretary provide an update on the Scottish Government's latest engagement with patients and their representatives and say what steps can be taken to ensure that they are involved in the next steps that were set out by the cabinet secretary today?

Michael Matheson: Earlier this morning, I met a group of the lead patients in order to set out my intentions to establish a full public inquiry and also to explain to them the process that is being put in place for individual clinical case reviews. I also took that opportunity to explain to them why, since my previous engagement with them, I had changed my position on what I thought was the most appropriate course of action, and I explained to them why I had chosen to move towards a full public inquiry, with the support of the First Minister and my cabinet colleagues. I can also ensure the

member that I will take up with the chair, once one is appointed, the need to ensure that patient representatives have an opportunity to feed into the terms of reference for the public inquiry.

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): It is a relief that we have at last got to the point of a public inquiry that so many have called for, but it should never have taken this long, and I thank all those campaigners who have been involved in getting us to this point.

The cabinet secretary spoke of the need for the inquiry to be independent and for there to be a twin-track approach in order to ensure that patients can get the answers that they need through a person-centred and trauma-informed process. What will he ensure is put in place so that, while those processes take place, patients and former patients are not further traumatised? Some are currently being retraumatised by being told to go through mediation and other processes. What can the cabinet secretary say to them now to reassure them that that will not continue to happen?

Michael Matheson: Obviously, a process has been put in place by NHS Tayside. As I have already indicated, my intention is to establish a process that will allow patients who have clinical questions and issues that they want to be clinically reviewed to have that done independently of NHS Tayside. That process will be person centred and trauma informed in the way in which it operates. I hope that that reassures Maggie Chapman that our intention is that, where reviews take place, they do not retraumatise patients with the difficult circumstances that they have already gone through. That is very much in our minds in how we shape the process, and I hope that, once it is established, patients will be able to give feedback on how effective it has been.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): Of course I welcome the announcement that the cabinet secretary has brought to the chamber but, once again, the evidence is that the voices of patients and healthcare professionals were ignored. The first time that the matter was raised was as long ago as 2011. It is high time that we saw a change of culture in our public services, especially towards brave and principled people who blow the whistle. Does the cabinet secretary agree that, in addition to the public inquiry, there ought to be a full review of whistleblowing practices with a view to the establishment of an independent office of the whistleblower for Scotland?

Michael Matheson: We have an independent whistleblower, who is based in the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman organisation, is independent of the Scottish Government, and has oversight of whistleblowing policy in Scotland. We

have already addressed the point that Stephen Kerr has made.

In reply to Sandesh Gulhane's question, I made the point that this is not just about managerial structural failures in NHS Tayside; it is also about clinical failures and the behaviour of clinicians who have had an impact regarding information that has not been provided to patients and to the review processes that have been taken forward. That is particularly important. This is not just about managers not getting it right; it is also about clinicians getting it wrong. That is why a public inquiry is critical.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Evelyn Tweed should be as brief as possible.

Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP): Accountability has been highlighted as one of the key reasons behind calls for a public inquiry. Can the cabinet secretary say any more about how the Scottish Government envisages the measures that have been outlined today delivering on that call?

Michael Matheson: We will be given an opportunity to have a very detailed investigation into not just the actions of NHS Tayside but some of the regulatory bodies that have responsibility for oversight of clinicians and health board inspections. I believe that that will help to identify where the failings have been and ensure that we can learn lessons for NHS Scotland as a whole for the future.

Stephen Kerr: On a point of order, Deputy Presiding Officer. When I asked my question, I forgot to refer to my entry in the register of members' interests. I am a director of WhistleblowersUK, which is a not-for-profit organisation that was set up to advocate for whistleblowers and to bring about positive changes in the law regarding whistleblowing.

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

There will be a brief pause while those on the front benches change.

Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a statement by Shirley-Anne Somerville on reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of her statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

15:34

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice (Shirley-Anne Somerville): The Scottish Government and the wider public sector have already done much to understand the extent of reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete—RAAC—issues in Scotland, and we recognise that there is more to do. Everyone with a responsibility for building safety takes the matter very seriously, and I assure the public that the Scottish Government is working at pace with partner organisations across the public sector on that challenge and that it has been doing so for some time.

The risk that is associated with the presence of RAAC in buildings is not a new issue in the construction sector. To fully understand the scope of RAAC, including in the school estate, we have been working with local authorities, NHS Scotland and other public sector organisations as they have conducted reviews of RAAC in their properties, which has allowed us to understand the extent of the issue, ensure that risks are managed and, where required, be reassured that remedial work and mitigations have been put in place.

The Institution of Structural Engineers first published guidance on RAAC to raise awareness among the structural engineer community in March 2022. My officials were made aware of that publication through engagement in professional channels at that time and have supported responsible building safety throughout. For example, in July 2022, learning directorate officials made contact with Scottish heads of property services and the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland to discuss RAAC; in December 2022, NHS Scotland Assure commissioned a survey team to establish the extent and condition of RAAC across the national health service estate; in early summer this year, my officials have met the Health and Safety Executive to discuss school estate matters, including RAAC, and met several local authorities individually to discuss their specific issues; and in July this year my officials issued a RAAC survey to all local authorities via the SHOPS network.

Furthermore, the ministerial working group on building and fire safety discussed RAAC, pressing

for and tracking progress on that issue since December 2022. The cross-sector working group on RAAC now supports our work, as my officials join up with their sector counterparts, key public sector partners and representatives of the private sector. That working group has been established as a more formal forum to share good practice and discuss recent professional advice, which builds on the work that was already under way.

More recently, my officials have been invited to join the cross-United-Kingdom Government working group on RAAC. In various recent meetings, we have once again been assured that the current Institution of Structural Engineers guidance and the risk-based approach remains appropriate for the assessment and management of RAAC in schools and other buildings. The most recent discussion with the Institution of Structural Engineers was on 5 September, when my officials met the director, who confirmed that its RAAC guidance has not changed and remains a good and valid practice measure in this area; we have issued it to local authorities for their information.

The Institution of Structural Engineers remains of the view that its guidance is in keeping with the Health and Safety Executive's approach to managing risk in a proportionate manner and considers all relevant factors.

Although the issue of RAAC has been under discussion for some time and action has been taken, the UK Government Department for Education changed its approach for RAAC specifically in schools on 31 August—a change in approach that Scottish ministers learned about through the media. Events of recent weeks have highlighted a deeply concerning level of chaos in the UK Government, overseen by the Secretary of State for Education. It is totally unacceptable that UK ministers prioritised briefing the media before alerting or sharing crucial information with devolved Governments. In what can only be described as a complete dereliction of duty, it was not until 18:56 on Sunday 3 September that the UK Government shared four pages of RAAC photographs dating as far back as 2018—not detailed or comprehensive structural reports but photographs with the bare minimum of supporting context. To be frank, the engagement has been insulting.

I confirm to the chamber that, following receipt of the photographs, we are still awaiting detailed and comprehensive structural reports, which we requested on Sunday 3 September and again on Tuesday 5 September. The withholding of that information was completely reckless and irresponsible. The secretary of state's disregard of the work of devolved Governments could not be clearer. More importantly, it has spread

unnecessary alarm among parents, staff and children.

As I stated earlier, work has been under way to deal with RAAC in the school estate. To date, RAAC has been identified in 40 school buildings across Scotland, although in some of those schools it is in parts of buildings that have not been in use for some time. Wherever RAAC has been found, mitigations have been put in place. For example, St Kentigern's academy in West Lothian has closed parts of its estate, including dining and kitchen areas, and Preston Lodge school in East Lothian has taken action to close off impacted classrooms and other areas. Riverside primary school fully closed its building over the summer holidays and moved pupils into alternative provision. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities has confirmed that safety is the central consideration and that there is robust guidance that is followed by every local authority to ensure that those buildings are safe to be in for pupils, staff and the public.

Local authorities have a clear responsibility to ensure that their schools are safe for pupils, staff and their users, and I know that they take that responsibility very seriously. They are carrying out assessments of their school buildings. We are aware that some parts of the school estate in some councils still need to complete full surveys. Ministers have been clear to authorities that those must be carried out as a matter of the highest priority and have offered assistance to councils in the matter where appropriate.

However, it is imperative that there is transparency around the schools where RAAC has been identified and the mitigations that are in place. We are working with COSLA to ensure that all local authorities will have published information about the schools that are affected by the end of this week. The cross-Government working group that we established is enabling a centralised understanding of how RAAC is affecting other sectors of the public estate. Work is on-going to assess properties across the public sector.

It is important to state again that the assessment process is proportionate and based on the guidance from the Institution of Structural Engineers. Once again, I reassure members in the chamber that, where RAAC has been identified, mitigations are in place in accordance with that guidance. What is clear is that significant work will need to be undertaken across the public sector estate in Scotland and right across the UK to deal with RAAC in the longer term. The First Minister has been clear that, although we do not have contingencies within Government to spend on RAAC, we will of course spend what we need to in order to ensure that our buildings are safe for those who use them.

I was pleased to see the Chancellor of the Exchequer seeming to commit over the weekend to the UK Government spending what is needed on the issue. However, the more recent briefings coming out of the UK Government indicating that there will be no new money are deeply worrying. Let me be clear: after a decade of Tory austerity and cuts to capital budgets, it is simply not sustainable for the UK Government to say that no new money will be made available.

We have been alive to the issue for some time, and long before the change in approach by the Department for Education. On 16 August, the Deputy First Minister wrote to the Treasury seeking clarity on new capital funding to deal with RAAC. On 3 September, our Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills wrote to the Secretary of State for Education to seek clarity on funding. Thus far, neither has received a response. Again, the ignorance is simply astounding in such a serious situation.

The UK Government cannot put its head in the sand. New capital money has to be made available, including to the devolved Governments, to allow us to take any action that may be required. Anything else would be a dereliction of duty from the Prime Minister and the chancellor. I hope that I can count on the support of all members in the chamber in making that case to the UK Government.

I will close as I started. The safety of buildings and their occupants is of the utmost importance. The actions that the Government is taking, along with public sector and industry partners, is designed to ensure that the appropriate measures are in place and provided for in the short and long term to ensure the safety of buildings for their occupants.

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

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of her statement. It is clear that, for more than 40 years, the use of RAAC will have been widespread in construction projects not only in the school estate but, potentially, across all buildings that were constructed during that era. We need full transparency. I welcome the publication of the information, as was signalled by the First Minister during First Minister's question time.

It is clear that the impact will stretch well beyond the school estate to include the NHS estate, general practitioner surgeries, colleges and,

potentially, council housing that was built during that period. However, it is not clear from the statement what position the Scottish Government is taking and what policy and guidance will be issued to councils, health boards and the further education sector when buildings are assessed as red—in other words, at critical risk or high risk. The cabinet secretary touched on the Institution of Structural Engineers' guidance. For public buildings that are assessed as being in the red category, is the expectation that those buildings will be closed to members of the public?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I thought that I had made it clear that our approach remains absolute reliance on expert advice from the Institution of Structural Engineers. That is important. For the sake of time, I will not go through how the institution suggests that we approach the red, amber and green categories, but that information is publicly available and I am happy to provide it to Miles Briggs should he wish to have it. That approach is being followed, and we strongly encourage councils and other public bodies to follow it in the future.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of her statement. Earlier today, the First Minister said that the Government has known about the issue for years, so why did it not ask councils to investigate until 17 July? The cabinet secretary was right to complain about the lack of communication and transparency from the UK Government, but the Scottish Government has failed on communication, too. Does she accept that that failure has put Scottish local authorities on the back foot and put pupils and staff in schools at risk? Will she confirm that the Scottish Government will do all that it can to equip local authorities with the resources that they need—including the skills and expertise—to fix the issue urgently?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I am not quite sure that Pam Duncan-Glancy was listening to what was on the first couple of pages of my statement, which went through the work that has been ongoing in national Government and local government.

I do not have time to go into the details of the Welsh education minister's recent statement, but Pam Duncan-Glancy will find in it exactly the same points as we are making. He shares the same frustration, and the Welsh are going through exactly the same process as we are. As I hope members would expect, we are staying close to the Welsh Government on its approach.

We will continue to work closely with councils. We have kept nothing at all from them. Indeed, we have made requests to the UK Government to be able to share everything that we get with local

government. We had to make that request specifically, which delayed our giving even the small piece of information that we had to councils. That was a disappointment, but I hope that what we have done is an example of following the principle that we are working hand in hand with local government on the issue.

Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP): I thank the cabinet secretary for the update on measures that the Scottish Government has taken since getting the guidance from the Institution of Structural Engineers. I find her comments extremely worrying, as is hearing what the Welsh education minister has said about timing and when we were made aware of the situation. Will the cabinet secretary please reaffirm when the Scottish Government was first informed by the UK Government? How can we take the matter forward?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: It is disappointing that we learned about the situation only on 31 August, and initially just through the media. It is important to have a frank conversation about how we found out about things, because we need such an approach to stop.

As I said in my statement, we have asked the UK Government—as has the Welsh Government—for further technical information, which we still do not have. If we are genuinely concerned—as, I am sure, we all are—and wishing to reassure the public, we surely want to work together on this of all issues, with no surprises and with full transparency within the Governments.

That is why it is important that, despite the disappointing way in which the change was articulated to the Scottish Government, we see a new approach whereby the Administrations can genuinely work together, share experience, share good practice and work out a way forward, although we will continue to follow the advice of the Institution of Structural Engineers, which differs from the plans that the Department for Education and Skills is taking forward.

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): In March 2022, ministers were made aware of RAAC guidance from the Institution of Structural Engineers, as the minister has said. In July 2022, learning directorate heads first flagged the risks from RAAC, and, in May 2023, East Lothian Council took action to close parts of a local school. However, it took until 14 August for the Scottish Government to convene a cross-public-sector working group on RAAC. If the safety of occupants of buildings, including children, is of the utmost importance to the Government, why was there an 18-month delay in taking action here, in Scotland?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Again, I say that there has been no delay on this. In my statement, I spoke about some examples of the work that is being done on this at the official and ministerial levels. Although the Government is not responsible for the local authority estate, for example, we are keen to work closely with our colleagues in local government to share advice and good practice when appropriate. That is why we continue to ensure that we have the right structures in place, so that we receive the reassurance that we need.

To say that no work has been undertaken either by local or national Government is not true. It does a disservice to the people in many local councils who have been working exceptionally hard on this issue for some time and have been reassuring parents, staff and pupils in the process.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): One school in my constituency is affected by RAAC, and that situation long predates devolution. Will the cabinet secretary highlight that point in her discussions with the UK Government and say that it should fall upon the UK Government to fund any repairs that are required?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: As I said in my statement, a number of letters on the issue that have been sent to the UK Government by various members of the Cabinet are awaiting a reply. It is important that those letters be replied to at speed. Again, I would say that our concern is shared by the Welsh Government.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Can the cabinet secretary confirm that 254 buildings across NHS Scotland are being surveyed? When was the survey that was commissioned by NHS Scotland Assure in December 2022 escalated beyond a desk review? When will we know the results of the survey, and will they be published? Can she also confirm that money will be made available urgently to remove RAAC and make all NHS buildings safe for patients and staff?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I have mentioned funding in my earlier answers and also talked about it in my statement. In reference to the number that Jackie Baillie identified, the desk review identified 254 buildings that have two or more characteristics that are consistent with the presence of RAAC. That does not, of course, mean that they contain RAAC, but that is why it is important that further work is done on that.

The surveys have now begun. In fact, the next phase of the surveys has commenced, with more work being done on site and not just through a desk review. Clearly, that will take some time. It will take approximately six to eight months to complete the full survey programme within the

NHS, but we are looking at opportunities to expedite the process if at all possible.

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): The cabinet secretary will be aware that, yesterday, North Lanarkshire Council revealed that the Pivot centre in Moodiesburn in my constituency is one of two buildings in that local authority area that have been identified as having RAAC. North Lanarkshire Council has been in touch with me and I am grateful for the quick action that it has taken on future plans to carry out work on the site. The council has also noted that up to 400 houses in the local authority area might be affected by RAAC. What support is the Scottish Government giving to NLC and other councils to identify such properties?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: It is very important that local authorities talk about what is happening within their school estate and in their wider public sector estate. As I said in my statement, we are keen to work alongside COSLA to ensure that all councils have published the information about their school estate by the end of this week. More work will clearly need to be done to ensure that there is transparency about what is happening within the wider council estate, including housing.

We are still in the discovery stage of awareness in the housing sector, but representatives from the Scottish Housing Regulator, the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations and the Chartered Institute of Housing Scotland have all been invited to participate in the cross-sector working group to ensure that public and private sector housing are involved in the work that is ongoing.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): If ministers were really across this problem, would Parliament and the public not have been told sooner that at least 40 schools and an untold number of hospitals contain this potentially lethal concrete? Ministers were nowhere near even understanding the issue, and no money was put aside. Instead, Liberal Democrats, not the Government, were the first to lay bare the scale of the problem. Indeed, the trigger for schools closing in England was a concrete beam failing at a school in Dunblane—a beam that was rated as safe but failed.

The Scottish education secretary said on “Channel 4 News” last night that this was an “isolated incident”. Does the cabinet secretary agree with her colleague? If so, how can she be sure that such an incident will not happen again, especially when we still do not know where this stuff is or how it has been used?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I say to Alex Cole-Hamilton with the greatest respect that one of the reasons why this has not caused the same public

alarm as has been caused since the Department for Education's change in approach last week is that national and local government have been quietly getting on with the job of ensuring that the work is done. That is exactly why some of the examples in East Lothian and West Lothian that I gave in my statement pre-date the rigmarole that we have had over the past week or so.

Parents have been being informed, as have the staff and the children. That is, rightly, done by those who are responsible for the building, through the local authority, which has been working with the local community about exactly what to do. To say that nothing has been done is disingenuous. I point to some of the projects that have already been undertaken through learning estate investment programme phases 1 and 2, which have dealt with some of the issues.

In the example of the Dunblane school, which is a Ministry of Defence school, the incident was not reported—either by the school, the Ministry of Defence or the Department for Education—to the Scottish Government or to any education authority in Scotland after it happened. The first time we found out about it, as Scottish Government ministers, was on 31 August. That is another very clear example of a disappointing lack of information sharing in relation to that school.

Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP): My question relates to my constituency interest in the school that has just been mentioned by Alex Cole-Hamilton, who does not represent Dunblane.

RAAC issues were identified at Queen Victoria school in Dunblane, as well as at the University of Stirling, which I will take up separately with the relevant minister. Both are very important institutions in my constituency. My understanding is that QVS is an MOD school, and that the responsibility for its upkeep lies with the UK Department for Education. In addition to what the cabinet secretary has just said, can she confirm that any issues that have been identified have been dealt with and that there is no on-going risk to students and staff in either of those buildings?

Given that QVS is an MOD school, was the Scottish Government made aware of the RAAC issues at QVS when they were first identified by the Department for Education?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: We understand that there was an issue at that MOD-run school in March 2023. It was investigated by the MOD in April and reported to the Department for Education for the UK in May 2023. As I said in my previous answer, the Scottish Government was informally told of the incident during a phone call that the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills had with Baroness Barran last Thursday. We have

expressed our concerns about the way in which the school incident was approached.

In relation to the University of Stirling, I understand that mitigation measures have been taken in the students union, where the issue has been identified.

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): As we are hearing, many of the buildings affected by RAAC are owned by local authorities, from schools such as Charleston academy and Forres academy to libraries and community centres. The Verity house agreement sets out a new partnership approach with local authorities, with added emphasis on working together on areas of shared responsibility. What more can the Scottish Government do to work in tandem with local authorities to give reassurance to members of the public that all arms of government are working together?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: It is a very important point that we should work together on this issue. That is why the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills and I met with the COSLA officials and some councillors at the start of this week. We will do so next week, too.

It is important not only that we publish information about schools but that local authorities provide context for it. For example, we have schools in which RAAC has been identified, but in a part of a building that has not been in use for many years. Providing context is important so that we can reassure pupils, staff and parents.

We will continue to work together, As I said in my statement, those meetings will continue, and they will be about not just the school estate but the wider council estate, too.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): In the north-east, several schools—including Mackie, Westhill and Northfield academies and Abbotswell, Cornhill and Quarryhill primaries—have been confirmed as containing RAAC.

Last weekend, Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy Neil Gray said that there was “no immediate risk” to people using those buildings, yet on Monday the First Minister said that the review during which councils will check buildings will take “some months”. On what basis did Neil Gray assert that there is no immediate risk? What extra funding and assistance are being provided to Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Council to perform the checks?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: The reassurance that people can be given—I say this with the greatest respect to my colleague Neil Gray and others—is that structural engineers, who are experts, have been working with the local

authorities that are responsible for each school so that they can say whether RAAC is there, to what extent it is there, and what mitigation measures need to be put in place. The Government has had reassurances that those mitigation measures—where they are required, based on that expert advice—are in place.

Clearly, we will continue discussions with all councils to ensure that we are keeping up to date on the mitigation measures and any long-term work that is required. I hope that Liam Kerr will join me in the calls that we are making to the UK Government to assist all devolved Administrations with the capital expenditure that will be required in the longer term, once we need to move on from mitigations to refurbishment or changes to those buildings, and that we will get that extra funding from the UK Government as requested.

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): There has been much discussion in the chamber this afternoon about who should be doing what and when, yet the reality is that, without borrowing powers, the Scottish Government cannot act by itself to fund wide-scale repairs, should they be found necessary.

In response to my question on Tuesday, the cabinet secretary stated that the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance had still to receive a response from HM Treasury

“regarding further financial support to help to deal with the consequences of RAAC”.—[*Official Report*, 5 September, c 8.]

Has a reply been received—I do not think so, but it would be nice to hear for sure again—and do we know how much we will be due?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: As to how much any final bill will be, obviously that will not be able to be determined until all the structural surveys have been undertaken right across the estates.

In response to Bill Kidd’s earlier question, no—I can confirm once again that we have not received a reply to the Deputy First Minister’s letter of 16 August. It is very important that we receive a reply, because if the Chancellor of the Exchequer is willing to go on television and talk about spending “what it takes”, it is important that he works with the devolved Administrations to ensure that we have a plan in place to enable us to take that work forward.

Foyso Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): West Lothian Council has been working for several years to identify and address the problem of RAAC in schools in its area. It has now been waiting nine months for an announcement on learning estate investment programme funding to find out whether its bid for a new school in Livingston has been successful. Can the cabinet secretary advise when an announcement will be

made on that funding, so that councils can actually begin to address the problem with RAAC in schools?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I thank Foyso Choudhury for that question, because it is a very important one. I appreciate that there are councils across the country that are waiting for an announcement on LEIP phase 3. As I said in an earlier answer, LEIP phases 1 and 2 have already dealt with some of those projects; indeed, the projects that councils came to us with for phases 1 and 2 that involved RAAC were funded.

Of course the Scottish ministers are now looking at the projects from local authorities where RAAC has been identified, and that will be part of the decision-making process for phase 3. As I hope that Foyso Choudhury will understand, we are having to look very carefully at LEIP phase 3 because of the global increase in construction costs. That presents a major capital challenge to us, and not just in the school estate. I hope that he and West Lothian Council can be assured that these matters are being taken into consideration when we look at LEIP phase 3.

Programme for Government 2023-24 (Opportunity)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-10347, in the name of Neil Gray, on opportunity within the 2023-24 programme for government. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak button.

16:06

The Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy (Neil Gray): I am pleased to open the debate and speak to the motion in my name, which is supported by colleagues, on how we seize the opportunities of an economy that is fair, green and growing—a wellbeing economy that helps our people and businesses to thrive through a just transition to net zero while addressing the twin climate and nature emergencies. By seizing the opportunities of the transition to net zero and growing our economy, we can reduce poverty and fund the high-quality public services that we rely on.

We are bringing forward this programme for government in challenging economic times. High inflation and rising interest rates continue to ramp up costs for both individuals and business trading conditions. Although the headline inflation rate is beginning to fall, economic growth has weakened this year and many businesses are having to change their business model in the light of the challenging economic conditions. Our businesses face a cost of the union crisis, with the cumulative impacts of Brexit on trading and labour supply, sustained high inflation and interest rates and the on-going high energy costs in energy-rich Scotland.

We are doing everything possible within the limited powers that are available to us and tight fiscal constraints to support businesses as well as households and to transform Scotland's economy.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): Whether members accept the premise of what Neil Gray just said about the cost of the union, that does not explain why Scotland lags behind other parts of the United Kingdom in terms of future business activity or equity investment. The data is clear that we are lagging behind parts of the UK such as the north-west on those two measures.

Neil Gray: Of course, if we look at gross domestic product growth since 2007 per capita, adjusting for population share, we see that we are ahead of the rest of the UK, with near double the growth rate since then. In addition, we have record levels of inward investment, as Daniel Johnson will

have seen and welcomed over the summer. Yes, there are challenges in what we are facing and, when comparing the position that Scotland is in as part of the UK with that of our European neighbours, who are richer, fairer and more socially just, we have to ask, why not Scotland? It is because we are being held back by the broken economic model that is being offered to us by Westminster.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The cabinet secretary has mentioned inflation. I do not know whether he has looked at inflation figures for other western economies. He has mentioned interest rates. Interest rates in the United States of America are higher than interest rates in the United Kingdom right now. Is that the fault of the Conservative Government?

Neil Gray: That will be cold comfort to the businesses that I have seen and interacted with over the summer, and I am sure that Murdo Fraser will have had such interactions. Those businesses are feeling the pain of the energy cost crisis, which has not been resolved by the poor market conditions that have been delivered by the UK Government or the inflationary pressures that have been driven up by the Truss-Kwarteng budget that crashed the economy. Murdo Fraser's points will be cold comfort to the businesses that are struggling to trade right now.

With the powers of independence, we could do so much more. Our "Building a New Scotland" series of papers shows that independent European countries that are comparable to Scotland continue to outperform the UK across a range of economic and social indicators. They are wealthier, more productive and innovative, and fairer and more equal. Why can Scotland not be like that? The reason is that we are bound to a failed UK economic model and do not hold the financial levers that are required.

Supporting economic growth is central to the programme for government—not growth for growth's sake, but growth with a purpose. That is one of the best ways to push forward our anti-poverty agenda, deliver fair work and sustain high-quality public services.

Growing the economy is not something that we can do alone. We must do it in partnership with businesses, and that will require listening to the business community. We will keep doing that through the new deal for business group. The programme for government commits us to making progress on the implementation of the group's recommendations, particularly on regulation.

We understand the challenges that businesses face, especially the impact of cumulative regulation, and we have committed to a programme of reform. We will work with

businesses to improve the way that we develop, review and implement regulations, and we will relaunch the regulatory review group and improve the business and regulatory impact assessment toolkit process.

Realistically, there will always be regulations that are not universally welcomed by the businesses that they apply to, but that makes it even more important to involve business in the conversation early, so that their voice is heard as part of the policy development process. When a good case is made for it, we are open to removing regulations and will develop a process to do that systematically as part of our reform programme.

Although where decisions are made will be a matter for the budget, we will build on the on-going work of the new deal for business sub-group on non-domestic rates to ensure that we give businesses and communities the best support that we can that they need. To support small business in particular, a dedicated unit will be established in the Scottish Government.

Businesses of all sizes tell me that they have difficulties in recruiting a skilled workforce. Recognising the impact of the UK Government's post-Brexit immigration policies on the labour market, we will launch a talent attraction and migration service, but it would be so much easier if we were not held back by the hostility to migration of both Labour and the Conservatives, or if we had the powers of independence that would enable us to ensure that we could have a migration system that was tailored to the needs of Scotland, our economy and the people who wish to come to Scotland to contribute to our nation.

Innovation and entrepreneurship are key strands of the national strategy for economic transformation, and we will invest £15 million to help to unleash talent from all walks of life in all parts of Scotland. That includes the provision of greater backing for proven initiatives such as Scottish EDGE and the Scottish ecosystem fund. As well as helping start-ups to scale up, that will help to build clusters of innovative businesses in growth sectors, and it will put our world-class universities at the heart of our economic future.

The package includes delivering the vision of the pathways report by Ana Stewart and Mark Logan, whom I thank for their work, through the launch of pre-start centres and pop-ups to encourage and support women and other underrepresented groups to become entrepreneurs.

Earlier today, I was pleased to announce that the pathways pre-start fund is open, which will make £1.5 million available for organisations to support more people into entrepreneurship and help to close the unacceptable gender gap in

entrepreneurial participation. Grants of up to £100,000 will be available, and details on how to apply can be found on the Scottish Government website at gov.scot.

Yesterday, I met a group of incredible women who are members of the black social entrepreneurship programme. That discussion demonstrated to me why that funding support is so important. We need to break down the barriers to women and people from black, Asian and minority backgrounds and give them the confidence, the skills, the contacts and the support network to start their own businesses. It was inspiring to hear their stories, and to hear about the opportunities that I hope that we can give them.

Investment in high-quality digital connectivity is also helping to transform our economy. Our provision of more than £600 million for the reaching 100 per cent programme is delivering full-fibre gigabit-capable connections and helping to make up the gaps in delivery in that UK Government policy area.

Our rural delivery plan will set out actions to build vibrant rural economies, and our regions will be empowered through regional economic partnerships.

As well as having a growing economy, we need a green economy that supports a healthy planet to allow us not only to meet our own climate targets while securing a just transition but to become a magnet for inward investment. Scotland continues to be the most attractive location outside London for inward investment and we can do even better. We are at the forefront of the clean energy transition. We have the people, skills and resources and must make the most of those strengths. We will build on our forthcoming and final energy strategy and just transition plan to launch a green industrial strategy by next summer and will work closely with business, industry and trade unions during its development. The strategy will set out how the Scottish Government will help businesses and investors to realise the enormous economic opportunities of the global transition in key sectors such as offshore wind and hydrogen.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary accept an intervention?

Neil Gray: I am really sorry, but I am pushed for time. I will try to come back to you later.

We will support workers in the oil and gas industry with our green skills passport and will support the economy of Aberdeen and the north-east with our £500 million just transition fund. We will drive investment in a new generation of onshore wind, establishing a sector deal with the industry that will cut the average determination time for section 36 applications by half, to 12 months, where there is no public inquiry. We will

also drive forward offshore wind skills development, focusing on the opportunities for diversification and skills transfer from our oil and gas sector, in line with that just transition.

Mobilising private investment will be a priority and a dedicated investment unit will be established to take forward the forthcoming recommendations of the First Minister's investor panel.

The final component of a wellbeing economy is fairness, because poverty and inequality inhibit greater growth and prosperity, as Nicola Sturgeon outlined in her contribution yesterday. When Scotland's businesses succeed, so do our people; when our people succeed, so do our businesses.

We pledge to work with employers to promote shared prosperity by boosting wages and continuing to increase the number of organisations paying at least the real living wage. That will include rolling out fair work conditionality in a way that supports workers but recognises that businesses need time to adjust. Our commitment to fund increased wages of £12 an hour for those who work in social care or who deliver funded early learning and childcare in the private, voluntary and independent sectors will help to address recruitment issues by attracting more people to work in those areas and will increase incomes, helping to address poverty. Improved childcare provision will enable parents and carers to work, increase their working hours or enter training and education. I consider that to be key to the infrastructure of a wellbeing economy.

I reiterate this Government's commitment to a fair, green and growing wellbeing economy. This Government will support and invest in people and in our businesses as we continue the journey towards net zero in the coming year. That will help to protect our planet and will create good jobs with fair wages, expand our tax base and provide important revenue for us to invest in tackling poverty and in our public services. By doing that, we will create opportunity, improving lives for people and communities across Scotland.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises the actions set out in the Programme for Government 2023-24 to build a fair, green and growing wellbeing economy, while addressing the twin climate and nature emergencies; agrees that a fair work agenda and a real living wage support all of society, particularly during a cost of living crisis, and commends the proposed rise for workers in social care and childcare to £12 an hour; believes that tackling the global climate emergency is the defining challenge of current times and that the necessity of climate leadership could not be more stark, and commends the Scottish Government's investment of £2.2 billion in 2023-24 to deliver a just transition to net zero and restore nature, which brings co-benefits in improved health outcomes, more accessible places, and empowered communities; acknowledges that the implementation of the recommendations of the New

Deal for Business Group, close working with small businesses, and a £15 million package to support enterprise and entrepreneurship will create new opportunities to start, scale and sustain businesses; agrees that this support, along with the Scottish Government's Green Industrial and Energy strategies, will ensure that businesses maximise the opportunities of a just transition to net zero; recognises the work of the Just Transition Fund, enabling pioneering work in a range of sectors, as well as the Scottish Government's investment in nature restoration, and looks forward to initiatives to establish a new national park, as well as the publication of Scotland's Biodiversity Strategy; welcomes the commitment to establish a sector deal with the onshore wind industry, including halving the average determination time for section 36 applications to 12 months where there is no public inquiry, and acknowledges that both the Climate Change and Just Transition plans will secure a climate resilient and biodiverse future in a way that maximises community benefit and is fair and just for everyone.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Murdo Fraser to speak to and move amendment S6M-10347.1.

16:18

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I start by saying that I welcome the language in the programme for government about the need for economic growth and welcome much of what we have just heard from the cabinet secretary. Talking about economic growth is important and is a welcome departure for this Government. We have not heard much about economic growth in recent times, perhaps because of the presence in the coalition of the anti-growth Greens.

The cabinet secretary is right that growth is essential. Without growth, we cannot have expanding businesses or secure, well-paid, jobs and—crucially—we cannot have the tax revenues that we will need if we are to fund our vital public services. We only have to look at the Scottish Fiscal Commission's very stark warnings about the black hole that is looming in Scottish public finances and is only going to expand over time to see that we cannot afford the public services that we have on the levels of taxation that we have. If we are not going to punish people with more taxes, which would be a huge mistake in my opinion, the only way to raise more tax revenue is by expanding the economy. So I welcome the rhetoric. Whether the delivery will be there remains to be seen.

There are two important background statistics that inform this debate. The first is the data that was released last week showing that the Scottish economy is estimated to have contracted by 0.3 per cent during the second quarter of this year. That contrasts with quarterly growth for the UK of 0.2 per cent in the same period. That is a difference in performance during a quarter—three months—of half of 1 per cent. That ties in with a longer-term trend in which, since 2014, the

Scottish economy has grown on average at one half of the UK rate. Despite the rhetoric that we have heard from those on the Scottish National Party and Labour benches in the Parliament during the past year, the UK economy has performed much more strongly than was previously thought.

Neil Gray: I have already outlined that, since 2007, GDP growth in Scotland has outperformed that in the rest of the UK. However, even if we take the point that Murdo Fraser made, why is it that the Institute for Fiscal Studies is saying that social mobility in the UK is in its worst place for 50 years? Surely we must invest in the wellbeing element as well as the economy element to ensure that GDP growth and the growing economy benefit people.

Murdo Fraser: It will benefit everyone if we grow the economy. On the point that the cabinet secretary made about going back to 2007, I accept that the Scottish economy grew more rapidly between 2007 to 2014—thanks to oil and gas—but that is not much use to us now. The record in more recent years is much less impressive, and that is what he needs to focus on.

We know that the UK economy performed much better than we previously thought thanks to a revision of data by the Office for National Statistics. We now know that UK economic performance coming out of Covid was much stronger than originally thought: the UK economy is now 0.6 per cent bigger than it was pre-Covid, it was third fastest growing in the G7 and it grew faster than any other major European economy. Since 2010, our economic growth has outperformed that of Germany, France and Japan. That is a very different picture from the one that has been painted by those on the other parties' benches, including Daniel Johnson, who I am happy to hear from now.

Daniel Johnson: On a similar note, about picking timeframes, does Murdo Fraser not need to acknowledge that UK growth has been depressed compared with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development average since 2008, and does he know of a reason why that might be the case?

Murdo Fraser: Mr Johnson has not been listening. Since 2010, our economic growth has outperformed that of Germany, France and Japan. He might not be up to date with the ONS's revision of statistics—maybe he should go back and read the figures—but we now know that the UK economy is performing better than previously thought.

That is not to say that there are not still significant challenges facing the UK economy—indeed, they face all western economies—but the

narrative of the UK as the sick man of Europe is now exposed as bogus. The challenge for us in Scotland is how we ensure that our economy at least matches the UK average.

The second bit of data comes from a study on business attitudes that was published only last week by the Fraser of Allander Institute. The study said that only 9 per cent of Scottish firms agree that the Scottish Government understands the business environment in Scotland, and 64 per cent of businesses disagree. That is a damning verdict on the Government's approach to business. Only 8 per cent of businesses think that the Scottish Government engages effectively with their sector. There is much more work to be done if this Government's new deal for business is to be anything other than empty rhetoric.

Against that backdrop, we need to ensure that we deliver stronger economic growth. It is not enough to talk about it; we need action rather than words. In that context, we welcome some of what was announced in the programme for government, but it falls far short of what is required.

We need to have a competitive tax regime in Scotland compared with the rest of the UK. Earlier this week, we learned that the First Minister had written to the Prime Minister calling for cuts in corporation tax. There is a rich irony in the First Minister of a Government that has hiked taxes for middle earners in Scotland now apparently being in favour of tax cuts. However, as usual, the SNP wants other people to cut taxes; it just does not want to cut the taxes that it controls, on which the only direction of travel is upwards.

We continually hear from those in the business community—and this was in the papers—that differential tax rates in Scotland act as a barrier to attracting the best talent to come and live and work here. That is why we are committed to at least reducing taxes to the UK level, as a driver to promote faster economic growth.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Murdo Fraser: No, I am sorry, but I am going to run out of time.

We know that, if Scottish growth at least matched that of the UK, that would give us an additional £7 billion in tax revenue during a 10-year period without having to increase rates.

Business regulation continues to be an issue. In the programme for government, there is a commitment to work with businesses to address the issue of regulation and to remove regulations that are no longer required. The Scottish Government can address that right now: there is a huge issue in the tourism sector with the licensing scheme for short-term lets, which affects not just

self-catering properties but bed and breakfasts, guest houses, home shares and house swaps. We are warned by those in the sector that it could cost thousands of jobs and millions of pounds to the economy if the Government does not think again. If the Government is serious about tackling regulation and about a new deal for business and listening to business, as it says that it is, it can demonstrate that right now by taking action to review the licensing scheme and postpone it. If it does not do that, all we have is empty rhetoric.

I am nearly out of time. In conclusion, I commend to the cabinet secretary an excellent publication from last week: “Grasping the Thistle”—not the book by Michael Russell, of course, but the new Scottish Conservative economic strategy, which is bursting with ideas about how to take the Scottish economy forward. If he wants to sit down with me to discuss that and work out how we can work together to grow the Scottish economy, I am right with him.

I move amendment S6M-10347.1, to leave out from first “recognises” to end and insert:

“notes that the Scottish economy contracted in the second quarter of 2022 in contrast to the wider UK economy, which grew in the same period, and that, since 2014, Scottish GDP per capita has grown on average at around one-half of the UK rate; further notes that this failure to grow the economy has real consequences for jobs, businesses and the public finances; acknowledges the language around economic growth in the Programme for Government 2023-24 and the limited measures to support growth and net zero, but regrets that these fall far short of what is required to deliver growth that at least matches the UK average, and calls on the Scottish Government to deliver a package of policies that will meaningfully promote growth, including a competitive tax regime, an approach to regulation that recognises the cost to business, a national workforce plan, investment in innovation and entrepreneurship, and a commitment to improve infrastructure and connectivity, including a timetable for the dualling of the A96, and the A9 between Perth and Inverness.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Daniel Johnson to speak to and move amendment 10347.2.

16:26

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): We agree with some things in the programme for government—specifically, around the pledges to accelerate consenting and planning processes. As the cabinet secretary knows, that is of vital importance so that we can realise our potential in renewables. As I have said to him, the scale of change and even just the level of the building of infrastructure that is required will be significant, and we have to prepare public opinion for that. I look forward to seeing the detail of those plans, because those consents have to come through more quickly than they do right now.

Neil Gray: I appreciate the constructive nature of Daniel Johnson’s opening remarks. I commend to him what is coming in the onshore sector deal, and I will be more than happy to discuss with him how we can ensure that there is a united front around the need for the substantial infrastructure that will be required for us to realise our energy potential.

Daniel Johnson: I thank the cabinet secretary for that. Likewise, there are other points on which we can agree, such as the additional resources for start-ups and small businesses, the fair work agenda and the increase in pay for social care workers and childcare workers to £12 an hour.

However, we have to look at the detail. The £15 million that is promised is a fraction of the £57 million that was cut from the enterprise budget the previous year. Likewise, the pay rise to £12 per hour comes three years after we first called for it and is now worth substantially less, because of inflation.

This week, Scotland needed a bold programme for government that matched the scale of the cost of living crisis and recognised the massive economic opportunity that we have in Scotland. However, as is usual with this Government, the spin in the build-up was much greater than the substance that was delivered. In the build-up, we heard that we would hear plans that would unleash Scotland’s economic potential but, reading through the bullet points, we saw that little more has been offered than meetings, consultations and more working groups.

That is simply not good enough. After 16 years, it is not good enough that the Government finally notices the economy, and it is not good enough that the First Minister thinks it an achievement to use the phrase “economic growth” in his speech. We need a First Minister who knows that the achievement is in delivering economic growth—in having a plan and the determination to deliver it.

The reality is that the economic data is stark. Although I think that Murdo Fraser was a little selective in his use of the data, I agree that we need to look at its broad range. Our growth has contracted by 0.3 per cent in the past quarter and, over the longer term, there are serious concerns.

Even if we look at more microeconomic data, we need to do a good deal more. The number of VAT-registered businesses in Scotland has fallen by more than 4,000 since 2020. We are lagging behind our regional competitors in other devolved nations. As I mentioned, the Royal Bank of Scotland’s purchasing managers’ index report makes it very clear that business confidence in Scotland is lower than that in any other nation or region in the UK; future business activity is near the bottom of the table; and, on job creation, we

are ninth out of 12. There are economic realities and reasons that we need to face up to. If we do not, businesses will continue to invest in Manchester and Leeds rather than Edinburgh and Glasgow.

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Net Zero and Just Transition (Màiri McAllan): Will the member give way?

Daniel Johnson: In a moment.

That is the reality. That is what business leaders are saying to me and, no doubt, to the ministers on the front bench. Unless we have a plan that faces those economic challenges and acknowledges where we have weaknesses, we simply will not make progress.

Màiri McAllan: I note the economic pressures of the past few years that Daniel Johnson relates. I wonder whether he agrees that returning to the European Union and free trade across the member nations thereof would be a positive for our economy, and whether he can confirm that Scottish Labour supports Scotland's return to the EU.

Daniel Johnson: One cannot argue that the way to deal with additional borders and barriers is by creating new ones with our closest trading partner. That is incoherent. The minister also cannot explain why regions and nations in this country with fewer economic powers and levers are outperforming Scotland. I suggest that that is a sign of this Government's economic failure.

Nor have we had detail on things that we could have expected more detail on. The Withers report set out a number of substantial changes—some of which I agree with, some of which I do not—but we needed to hear more. We need to overhaul our skills system so that we move beyond one that is focused on introducing our young people into the world of work to one that also reskills and upskills. That is vital if we are to realise our renewables potential.

It is good to see that the First Minister and the Government have clearly been listening to our critique, but some of their attacks reveal the error in their economic understanding. The Government and the Parliament have been too focused on social policy to the exclusion of economic policy, but the fact that this Government thinks that it has to be either/or reveals the narrowness of its binary perspective on all issues. Let me be very clear: we believe in a successful and growing economy so that we deliver the tax receipts so that we can pay for the social policies and the public services.

Social policy is vital, but we get to deliver it only if we have a successful economic vision. That is Labour's vision. That is what lies behind our plans for GB energy and the green prosperity plan; it is

about having a plan so that we can directly invest, through a state-owned company, in our future and our economic strategy. That is also why we have convened an independent advisory board for growth so that we can bring together leaders from across finance, energy, food and drink, arts and culture and trade unions to help deliver a plan for Scotland through partnership and co-operation.

This debate is about opportunity, but the opportunity that this country needs is to get rid of this tired, drifting Government and replace it with one that is focused on delivering a plan, realising our economic opportunities and delivering for everyone in this country—an opportunity and a plan that Scottish Labour is determined to deliver.

I move amendment S6M-10347.2, to leave from “while addressing” to end and insert:

“but regrets that after 16 years of a Scottish National Party administration, and despite the jobs and incomes at stake, a Green Industrial Strategy remains a pledge not a reality; agrees that a fair work agenda and a real living wage support all of society, particularly during a cost of living crisis; welcomes the proposed pay rise for care workers to £12 an hour, but believes that this must increase to £15 an hour during the current parliamentary session; believes that tackling the global climate emergency is the defining challenge of current times and that the necessity of climate leadership could not be more stark; calls on the Scottish Government to put a detailed plan for skills development at the heart of the just transition to net zero and efforts to restore nature; further calls on the Scottish Government to ensure that growth in both the onshore and offshore wind sectors leads to growth in Scottish supply chains, jobs and incomes; welcomes the commitment by the UK Labour Party to establish a publicly-owned energy company with its headquarters in Scotland, to reduce energy bills, create good local jobs and deliver 100% clear power for the UK by 2030, and further welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to reform land ownership, but urges it to be more radical to change the land ownership profile of Scotland, including ensuring that the community right to buy works for urban and rural communities.”

16:32

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I have been through many programmes for Government. Others, I have to say, have been quite exciting, on occasion. As a political geek, I enjoyed many of those occasions. Today and this week, though, have—I must say—been completely uninspiring. The lack of appreciation for the programme for Government even from the Government's own back benchers was evident earlier this week.

Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Willie Rennie: No—not just now.

In reality, the Government has no ideas and no money. It has overcommitted and has not managed its public finances well, and it has no direction, as a result. The programme for

Government was full of minutiae, but also of dispensed policies. Let us take the council tax. The Government used to be in favour of scrapping it completely. We have been through many reform discussions, none of which has resulted in anything. Now, the Government has resorted to hiking it up more than it has ever done before.

Neil Gray: Will Willie Rennie acknowledge that we are looking to expand early learning and childcare and to pay childcare workers £12 an hour, and that we are paying social care workers £12 an hour and bringing forward a green industrial strategy? Does he not support any of those proposals in the programme for Government?

Willie Rennie: Neil Gray just has to wait, because I am coming to those issues, which are far from satisfactory. As he well knows, the proposals do not solve the problems that have been evident in the system for some time. The cabinet secretary did not mention council tax, which the Government was for scrapping, but is now hiking up more than ever before. The Government was going to have a replacement for Erasmus. Now it is just a pilot. It was going to scrap the dental charges for NHS treatment. Now they will be increased more than ever.

We were going to have a peace institute, which has now gone, and a deposit return scheme, which has also gone. Even the de facto referendum, which the Government previously agreed to whole-heartedly, has been ditched. At the heart of this Government is independence, but even that policy has been dispensed with.

However, there is also very little progress in other areas. I will talk about early learning and childcare, if the minister is listening. The problem with early learning and childcare is the difference in pay rates between state provision for private and voluntary nurseries versus council nurseries. The result of that is an exodus of experienced staff, whether to other jobs in the council or elsewhere.

A move to £12 an hour will pay those at the bottom more, which is welcome, but will it deal with the exodus of experienced staff? No, it will not. There is still the fundamental problem of being unable to retain good staff in the private and voluntary sector. Problems will be stored up for the future, because we need the private and voluntary sector to give us the flexibility that we need for the future workforce—

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Willie Rennie: No—not just now.

The Government has missed the point completely on the nursery sector. The Government is all about tinkering and minutiae.

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Willie Rennie: No—not just now.

We can look at other areas. Social care services were promised—back in 2016, I think—that delayed discharge would be abolished completely, but we now have the longest waits and the biggest staff shortages ever.

We were promised that the adult disability payment was going to be a great new system, but there are incredibly long waits for people who are waiting on their payments. The poverty-related attainment gap is as wide as it has ever been—in secondary 3, the rates are appalling—and for the Government to boast that stagnation in other areas is somehow progress lets young people down.

We see the lowest number of new starts in social housing for some time. There are fundamental problems with this Government's performance—it cannot even do the things that it promised to do.

I will talk about agriculture, because that is an area in which the Government could give farmers some clarity. The target is to reduce emissions from the agricultural sector by 31 per cent by 2032. Do we have the necessary details to enable farmers to act and change their practice and invest in their farms? No, we do not. We have the tiers, and the broad outline, but do we have any numbers attached to any of those tiers? No, we do not. There is a big argument going on with the environmental sector about how much is put in each tier. I get that, but that problem will not be solved by avoiding the issue. For the sake of our climate and our food and drink sector, we need to get on and provide clarity for the farmers.

Earlier today, I was outside the Parliament speaking to college lecturers. Those lecturers have been in industrial dispute probably ever since I have been in this Parliament—for 10 or 11 years. The reason is that this Government has undervalued the college sector for all that time. If we are going to invest in our future and in the skilled workforce for renewables that the minister talked about, we are going to have to invest in our colleges. However, the first act of the new education minister when he came into post was to cut multimillions from the budget. How is that investing in our young people and their future, and in our colleges? I think that we will have more industrial dissent unless this Government gets its act together with the college sector.

I conclude with one final point. Scotland has a massive opportunity, but we are not going to exploit that opportunity unless we create infrastructure. The warning in that respect is Burntisland Fabrications, in which we invested £50 million but did not create any jobs on the back of it. BiFab could not even build the jackets for the NnG wind farm that we can see from the Fife coast. That is a warning that this Government needs to get its act together. We need less talk about independence and more talk about getting stuff done.

16:39

Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP): Last night, I hosted in this Parliament an event that was organised by Scottish Financial Enterprise. This morning, I was at a breakfast event with Scottish Renewables and this evening I will be going to an event with Scotland Food & Drink. The reason why I mention those is that they represent three great examples, among many, of sectors in which Scotland is genuinely leading the world and has huge potential to deliver economic opportunity.

The scale of that opportunity is enormous, so I want members and the Government to reflect on something that is happening across the sea in Ireland, where the Government there's biggest economic challenge at the moment is how to invest the €65 billion surplus that it is projecting over the next four years. That is the size of the prize if we get our economy moving in the right direction and invest in business and sectors to deliver on the potential. Clearly, Ireland is a different country and has a different economy—not least, because it has the full powers of independence—and many other factors are different, but that example shows that, if we focus on what Scotland can do with those and other sectors, there is enormous potential.

What have we achieved? As has already been mentioned, Scotland's direct investment performance is the best in the UK outside London. Our exports are growing at twice the rate of those of the rest of the UK. Unemployment over recent years has been lower than it has been in the rest of the UK. We have one of the most skilled populations in Europe, we have more of the best universities per head of population than other countries have and—contrary to some of the comments that Murdo Fraser was making earlier—significantly more people from the rest of the UK are attracted to come and work here than travel in the other direction.

However, of course we have challenges, and there are many things that we need to do better. I want to go through some of the positive things that are covered in the programme for government around the theme of opportunity and also say

where we need to make sure that we deliver on the detail.

First, however, I want to reflect on the reaction from businesses, which welcomed the messaging very much, but gave the important caveat that they need to see the detail and need to understand what is happening on delivery. I know that the Government recognises that, but it is important to state that falling down on delivery, as has often been the case in the past, means that we do not realise the potential that I spoke of.

I turn to some specifics. I welcome the focus on an innovation strategy. However—again—it is important to deliver specific actions on that, particularly in relation to cluster building, cluster accreditation and so on.

The comments on regulation are hugely welcome. We understand the issue of cumulative impact and agree that the business and regulatory impact assessment process has to have teeth, as I believe it had in the past. That really needs to be internalised and the Government must work with business, as I know it is doing, to deliver on that.

Skills and the labour market are hugely important for businesses in every sector. It is important to include businesses at an early stage in the work around taking forward the Withers review, so that we do not lose sight of the needs that they have in that regard.

Clearly, the childcare investment is hugely welcome, but it is also important to ensure that capacity is in place to deliver on that.

I welcome the work that has been taken forward on talent attraction, but, again, we must not focus on international opportunities to the extent that we lose sight of the issue of UK talent attraction.

The net zero investments are hugely important in terms of how we are going to deliver decarbonisation across society, but we need to ensure that that investment is joined up so that the spend and procurement help to drive and build sectors in Scotland's economy and give us an economic development boost.

Of course, it is important to take forward the work on attracting investment into the net zero sector. I acknowledge the work of Angus MacPherson and I know that the First Minister's investor panel will be reporting on the issue. That is hugely important as part of this drive. That issue was a big topic of conversation at the Scottish Financial Enterprise event last night, as was the need for the green industrial strategy. We have discussed that issue and we know what a good strategy should look like, in terms of its format. The sector is absolutely up for that and is very keen to engage. However, we need to get something that is not just soundbites and

aspiration, but involves real actions, is evidence driven and can deliver on the potential sooner rather than later.

I welcome the commitment to take forward green ports. However, it is important that the Government does not lose the focus on the fair work and living wage commitments, and the conditionality, that were secured during negotiations with the UK Government on that initiative—I know that it will not—and that it rolls out wider conditionality where we can, because that drives higher wages, which is to the good of the whole economy, and not just the good of the individuals who receive those wages.

I was interested to see the response of the UK Government to Tom Hunter's ask in relation to focused relief for corporation tax, which I think is a much more grown-up and sensible strategy than blanket increases or blanket reductions, because it allows us to build clusters. I do not know whether what we are seeing is the start of the Scottish Government taking a position with regard to how we will approach corporation tax and company law more generally when we have those powers as an independent country, but I think that it is an interesting first step in that regard.

Finally, I will focus on delivery, which, as I have said, is where we often fall down. The national strategy for economic transformation lays out what needs to be done. That should be taken forward. Trying to find the next shiny new thing or going off on a tangent because civil servants have thought of something else is not helpful. We should stick to the knitting—we should stick to what is in NSET, and deliver the 77 actions.

Agency reform is mentioned. I am not quite sure where that is going, but we should not pull resources back to the centre or to Government from agencies. Agencies deliver. That is where the action happens, that is where the engagement with business is, and that is what is important. Frankly, it is much more important than what the Government is doing in that space.

It is very important to streamline funding streams. The plethora of things out there is confusing and unhelpful for business. Business wants to have easy processes for interacting with Government and agencies.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Mr McKee, I ask you to conclude.

Ivan McKee: That is hugely important, as is data sharing across that part of the scope of the Government's work.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr McKee. I have to ask you to conclude.

Ivan McKee: There is a lot of good stuff, but a lot to focus on, as well.

The Presiding Officer: I call Brian Whittle.

16:46

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): Thank you, Presiding Officer. Will you clarify how much time I have for my speech? [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Six minutes.

Brian Whittle: Six minutes and the "Two minutes" that I heard is eight minutes. Good.

I am delighted to speak in this debate in a new portfolio for me. Members may or may not be comforted by the fact that the topics that I wish to discuss remain very similar to the topics that I have always discussed and which I am passionate about. Therefore, there will be a similar message from a different viewpoint.

I think that the biggest drag on our economy is our very poor health record. We recently heard that the cost of obesity to Scotland's economy has now risen to £5 billion. Our mental health bill is now £4.5 billion. We know that 10 per cent of the national health service's budget goes on treating diabetes and related conditions. While we discuss the economy, it is really important that we think about other portfolios, and we need to start with that portfolio.

I have often said that I believe that education is the solution to health and welfare issues—I strongly believe that. When we are looking at tackling our poor health record, we need to keep our focus on the education environment.

Neil Gray: I will pose the same question as I posed to Murdo Fraser. Why has the IFS reported this morning that social mobility in the UK, in which education plays such an important role, is the worst that it has been for 50 years?

Brian Whittle: I noticed that the cabinet secretary went with the UK; he did not break things down and say how Scotland is doing. Our education has been on the slide since the SNP came into power. That has a huge implication and explains why our economy is sluggish. Perhaps I will get the chance later on in this term to expand on those themes.

While we are on education, if we are to fully realise the opportunities that are available in Scotland, it is about time that we started to do things such as weaving the green economy, the blue economy and the rural economy into our education system. We need to link them with our business needs. We need to ensure that pupils understand the opportunities that are being created as we shift our economy towards net zero. We need engineers, tradespeople, software developers and—I have found this out—environmental protection officers. Apparently, we

are very short of them, too, and they are required to ensure that our food production is certified for use here and for export. We still have not tackled the problem of getting women into science, technology, engineering and mathematics. There is a huge need there, and the Scottish Government is, unfortunately, guilty of very lazy politics. It is very good at publishing very impressive targets without the route map to get there. It is content with deflecting responsibility.

I am glad to see Patrick Harvie in the chamber, because he has boldly declared that 1 million homes will be retrofitted with heat pumps between 2025 and 2030 without the slightest idea of what that means in respect of workforce and cost.

The construction industry highlighted in a round-table discussion that, to hit the Government's 2030 targets, it needs in excess of 22,500 tradespeople and engineers by 2028. Where will it get them from? The Scottish Government has absolutely no idea. That is before we get into the supply chain network to service that expansion. I am all for ambitious stretch targets. We need to decide where we want to go and then map out how to get there. However, although those targets and responsibility are the Scottish Government's, it reneges on that responsibility time and again as each target is missed.

What is essential in the business world is to create the need that gives business the confidence to invest and service that need. Those who work in our oil and gas sector will have confidence to retrain if they are safe in the knowledge that there is an industry that they can go to that is safe, secure and growing. That is how we develop a just transition. The Scottish Government way is to announce a just transition and to then attack the Scottish oil and gas sector—it is all stick and no carrot.

Màiri McAllan: As the member mentions, Scotland's climate targets are driving a lot of what we need to do in heat decarbonisation. If I remind him that his party enthusiastically backed those targets, do I have his support to work with me constructively on what we need to do to realise them?

Brian Whittle: It would be great to have that opportunity to work with the Scottish Government, because we do support those targets. That is my point: I support the ambitious targets, but there is no route map to get there.

We should be a world leader in green hydrogen, for example, but once again the Government goes about it back to front. How about incentivising the really big energy users, heavy industry, goods vehicles and public transport—end users that the green hydrogen industry can service—to commit to that shift? We have wind and solar to create the

green hydrogen, so let us take it off the grid, which, in turn, will encourage the private sector, which, incidentally, is desperate to shift investment to the green economy. Once we have that established economy, it can grow into other sectors and there will be export opportunities. Instead, we have a Scottish Government that tinkers around the edges as it tries to create hydrogen generation without considering how to develop the market.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Brian Whittle: Sorry—I am running out of time.

The same applies to heat pumps. If we are serious about net zero, we should tackle the biggest polluters first—off-grid oil-fired heating systems, as well as under-floor heating systems. That will be expensive, because it requires significant insulation of the dwellings, but that will create the market place and the direction of travel, and it will deliver the net zero targets in a positive and progressive way.

The Presiding Officer: I must ask you to conclude at this point, Mr Whittle.

Brian Whittle: Scotland has economic opportunities, but such opportunities are never grasped by the Scottish Government.

16:52

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): I welcome the programme for government and the ambitious announcements that the First Minister made this week. A total of 14 bills are to be introduced, including, just to name four, those relating to education, land reform, housing and Scottish languages, which can all lead to important outcomes for the country. The programme for government is anti-poverty and pro-growth, which will certainly help to deliver for every community across the country, including my Greenock and Inverclyde constituency.

I particularly welcome the announcement that access to funded childcare will be expanded from nine months through to the end of primary school, with early adopter communities in six councils—Inverclyde, Fife, Shetland, Glasgow, Clackmannanshire and Dundee. That policy means that 13,000 additional children stand to benefit by the end of this parliamentary term, which means that another 13,000 children will have a greater opportunity to have the best start in their education journey. John Swinney spoke strongly about his commitment to the expansion of early years education and why it is so vital. The First Minister's announcement on Tuesday built on that commitment.

The increase to a £12 per hour wage for social care and childcare staff is hugely important and will benefit my constituents, particularly as Inverclyde has a growing older population, who are more likely to require social care support. Across the country, up to 100,000 people—the vast majority of whom are women—will benefit from the policy, which might be seen as an opportunity for some people who never considered working in those sectors previously. The policy will result in some staff earning an additional £2,000 on top of their current wages.

Sadly, a growing number of my constituents are contacting my office because they are struggling with the cost of living crisis that the Tories' obsession with Brexit and the disastrous Truss-Kwarteng budget last September—a budget that has wreaked havoc on a UK economy that was already struggling—have created. I wonder whether the Scottish Tories still stand by their calls for the Scottish Government to follow suit on last year's absolute folly.

My constituents want assistance, and I know that the £405 million that is being invested in the Scottish child payment this year, which will help more than 300,000 children across the country, is welcome. In total, £5.3 billion will be invested in social security this year, which is an investment in people.

The *Financial Times* has called the UK

“a poor society, with some very rich people.”

Considering that the UK is regarded as the fifth richest country in the world, that is a pretty damning indictment. I am not going to launch into a debate on class politics, but I am sure that I can speak for the vast majority of my constituents when I say that at no time should the majority of the population be left to struggle as trickle-down economics continues to fail millions of people across Scotland and the rest of the UK.

My constituents will be shocked to learn that both London Labour and the branch office in Scotland have sold the jerseys when it comes to looking after people. Labour no longer wants to scrap the bedroom tax or the rape clause—it somehow wants to make it a bit fairer. Labour no longer wants to deliver a progressive taxation system so that those who can afford to may pay more, can. Labour no longer wants to abolish the House of Lords; instead, it wants to stuff it full of more of its cronies. The so-called party of the working class has turned into a Tory Party tribute act in order to try to win votes in England. However, the SNP has a record of delivery in our devolved Parliament and, with the full powers of independence, we as a nation could achieve so much more. We would not be under the threat of the Westminster Internal Market Act 2020, which

any future UK Government could use to limit the actions of this Parliament and this Government.

I welcome the closer working relationships with the business community, including the £50 million package to support enterprise and entrepreneurship. That will create new opportunities to start, scale up and sustain businesses. Along with the Scottish Government's green industrial and energy strategies, that will ensure that businesses maximise the opportunities of a just transition to net zero.

I also look forward to the publication of the addressing depopulation action plan. During the summer recess, a number of ministers visited my Greenock and Inverclyde constituency, for which I am grateful. I met Emma Roddick, the Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees, to discuss Inverclyde's acute depopulation challenges. Losing more than 30,000 people since 1979 was always going to be a challenge, but with a growing older population placing more challenges on local public services, we have a need, but also an opportunity, to do something to turn that around.

However, once again, the dead hand of Westminster is not helping, with immigration powers reserved to Westminster. Once upon a time, even the Labour Party supported the Parliament's acting to try to address population decline, with Lord Jack McConnell's fresh talent initiative. Sadly, it was the UK Labour Party that scrapped that policy in 2008 when it introduced a points-based system and thus got rid of a limited approach that was helping Scotland. As Labour is now a pro-Brexit party, it sees no opportunity for Scotland to deliver policies to help our population challenge, which is even greater now than it was when Labour was last in power in the Parliament.

I welcome the announcement about the bill on Scottish languages. Languages are hugely important to our culture and communities, and working to preserve as well as grow them shows a respect for our past. There are opportunities for more people to engage with our culture and traditions, which, clearly, will have economic benefits across the country.

I am genuinely pleased that the programme for government has solid measures that will provide a wide range of opportunities for Scotland, as well as for my Greenock and Inverclyde constituency.

16:58

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): I am in the Parliament because I believe that Scotland can be a land of opportunity for all, where everyone, no matter their background, can fulfil their potential. However, I am also here because I know that it can be that land of opportunity only if we make it so. That does not happen by accident.

For too many, opportunities are few and inequality is the default. That will not just fix itself; we have to fix that by design.

It has long been my view that education is the key to delivering that fix, while it is the leveller for the inequality and lack of opportunity. When done well, it can break down inequalities, open opportunities and shatter the glass, class or stepped ceiling in its way. From the earliest years of a young person's life, education begins to build the blocks of future opportunity. When it is valued and nourished, it can do this throughout life's stages: in school, where we learn about the world around us; in college and university, where we learn to live and work in the world; and even in the workplace or in our community, when we learn to apply education. The opportunities that education brings are endless.

That is why I was so disappointed that, on education, the programme for government is full of reannounced pledges and vague intent. From the earliest years, children are shut out of opportunity and families are held back. I and my party welcomed the Government's announcement on wraparound childcare when it was first made, and I welcome it again this week, but I recognise that it is not new and still falls short of addressing the barriers that many face. A recent Audit Scotland report found that poorer people are less likely to take up funded childcare, because it is inflexible for the types of jobs that they are in. Wraparound childcare has to wrap around hospitality and shift workers' roles, too.

Recent reports have found a decline in the private and voluntary childcare sector, where flexibility is often found. We need clarity on how the Government will address that. A digital platform—or to call a spade a spade, a website—is like an offer from the 1990s and will not address the structural issues that underpin the sector's position.

School is a place where opportunity is aplenty, but children and staff do not feel safe there just now. Most young people go to school to learn, see friends and socialise, but the rise in violent incidents is detracting from that. Those incidents are few, but they are the canary in the coal mine that indicates that the Government has lost control of education.

The increase in lower-level poor behaviour shows that anger and anxiety are bubbling under the surface. Classrooms are like pressure cookers, families are struggling to make ends meet and the promised free school meals roll-out has now been delayed by another two years under the programme for government. It is not too late to turn that around, but only if the Government acts fast, listens to parents, pupils and trade unions, and releases the pressures that they are all under.

That has to start with the SNP-Green Government at least coming good on its promises on free school meals, smaller class sizes and increased non-contact time for teachers.

Màiri McAllan: Pam Duncan-Glancy was right to mention the pressures that are bearing down on families. Does she support the two-child cap, the rape clause and the bedroom tax? If—as I suspect—she does not, will she call on Anas Sarwar and Keir Starmer to drop them? Their position appears to be that they support those measures.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: I think that the cabinet secretary is aware that Anas Sarwar has already said that we will do all that we can to ensure that universal credit and all its failings—including the two-child limit—are improved and reformed so that the benefit delivers for people across the UK and not just here in Scotland.

I cannot express enough my disappointment that the programme for government does not mention a transition strategy for young disabled people. Such a strategy was first promised in the SNP's 2016 manifesto; seven years later, we are still waiting. We cannot leave the futures of young disabled people to the whim of one Government or the next. I ask members across the chamber to support my bill to make sure that that does not happen and to give young disabled people the fighting chance that they deserve.

Speaking of a fighting chance, our colleges and unis need them, too, as Willie Rennie highlighted. The further and higher education sector is built for opportunity—that is what it is there to provide—but it is crying out for help and not getting it. The sector got a flat-cash settlement—a cut—and the first thing that the new minister did was whip away the £46 million that the Government had promised. The only thing that is worse than not having enough money in the first place is thinking that you have it, planning to use it and then having it snatched away.

Today, lecturers were outside the Parliament to tell us about the real impact of that. Their jobs are on the line. When asked to step into the fiasco—as in relation to City of Glasgow College—the minister has acted like a commentator and not the person where the buck stops.

Universities are burst, too—they are losing out on core research funding and desperately trying to plug the funding gaps that have been left by the Government underfunding places. We are still waiting for a replacement for Erasmus, three years after it was promised. In that time, the Welsh Labour Government has developed a scheme that has involved 6,000 exchanges and 95 countries, yet the Scottish Government cannot tell us what

model it will use or at what cost, far less get any students going abroad.

This week's programme for government provided a chance to fix all that. Scotland can be a land of opportunity, and an excellent education system has the potential to level the playing field, but we need a Government that is serious about that.

It really is time for change. I know that, we know that, people out there know that and I believe that the Government knows it, too. It is time to bring back hope and tear down the barriers that create inequality, and that starts by fixing our crumbling education system, by investing in education, by not just making big promises but delivering them, and by smashing the glass, class and staired ceilings to opportunity that too many people face. Scottish Labour can bring opportunity to Scotland for all, and I believe that we will.

17:04

Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP): Ivan McKee gave us an excellent appraisal of some of the real positives in our economy as well as some of the challenges. Last week's Fraser of Allander Institute poll on Scottish businesses' attitudes to the Scottish Government's relationship with business undoubtedly made for uncomfortable reading. I am pretty sure that the Government would also have been aware of the fact that, as a party and a Government, we needed to have a reset with the business community to regain the trust and belief that this party has enjoyed over many years.

From my experience of running my business, whether it was farming or the catering and food element, prior to coming to this place, I know that the SNP was there for those industries and that it did everything in its power to help us to be as successful as we possibly could be. I have said many times in this chamber that the national food and drink policy, which was introduced by Richard Lochhead in 2008, was a game changer in terms of the relationship with and the confidence that the industry took from Government. Its positivity meant that it was hugely instrumental in driving the big ambition and success of the industry.

Over the years, I have had many conversations with Richard Lochhead and John Swinney on many aspects of how business was faring at any particular time, and I was always confident that I was being heard and the issues that I raised were seen as legitimate and worthy of further consideration, even if not all my ideas were actually implemented. With all due respect, my experience of dealing with Ross Finnie in his role during the Liberal Democrat-Labour years was not

nearly so constructive, despite the fact that he was a very nice person to talk to.

It is perhaps for that reason that I found last week's poll so disturbing. I always regarded the SNP as being a party for all the people of Scotland, including the huge array of immensely talented and dynamic small and medium-sized enterprises that make up more than 80 per cent of Scotland's business community. Having their trust is vital if we are to continue to be a party for all that is recognised as a force for good, for ambition, for aspiration and for entrepreneurial endeavour. That is the party that I vote for, that I campaigned for and for which I stood as a candidate to be elected to this place so that we can continue to represent and improve the lives of our people and businesses, and be the good international neighbours that we want to be.

One of the things that gives this party the respect and trust of the business community and all our citizens is the level of engagement that we have with the people whom we represent. Whether it be businesses, community groups, industry bodies or third-sector organisations, their voices are heard and understood and, what is more, they all know that they are being heard and understood. The rationale of those early years made sense then and it still makes sense now. I was therefore very heartened by the programme for government's content and its focus on engagement.

We can read the responses that have emanated as a result of the First Minister's statement on Tuesday, and it would be interesting to see how the Fraser of Allander Institute's survey would read if it was being conducted today. The programme for government makes sense by tying the aim of tackling poverty to growing the economy while encouraging the entrepreneurship for which Scotland is famed, while looking at the regulatory burdens that businesses currently face. Business organisations are welcoming the approach.

The Food and Drink Federation Scotland's chief executive officer, David Thomson, said:

"It is positive to see the First Minister's commitment to work with Scottish businesses to remove regulations that are no longer required and to ensure that they are involved at the earliest stage of policy development.

The establishment of a Small Business Unit is welcome. It is vital that our food and drink manufacturers ... are represented in this work to ensure their views are heard."

The Federation of Small Businesses Scotland policy chair, Andrew McRae, said:

"Any efforts to boost start-ups need to see some of the practical barriers to setting up in business removed. This includes childcare, so we welcome the announcement of much needed additional support here."

He went on to say:

“we’re pleased to hear him recommit to ... a specific Small Business Unit and a commitment to tackling the cumulative impact of regulations, including removing those which are no longer required.”

Our critical friend Liz Cameron from Scottish Chambers of Commerce highlighted the point that I made at the start of my contribution, in saying:

“Is Government on the side of business? That’s the question at the forefront of the business community. There is much in today’s announcement that businesses will welcome, particularly the essential focus on inward investment and exporting”.

On the labour market, she said:

“Businesses will welcome the government prioritising childcare as a way of supporting households and enabling participation in the labour market.”

She went on:

“The development of a new funding model for post-school education provision is welcomed for improving lifelong learning, this must be balanced with widening access to training and skills across all pathways.”

The Scottish Council for Development and Industry said:

“We support the focus on creating a wellbeing economy, on economic growth and investment in childcare which is key to enabling more people to access meaningful work ... Implementation of the new deal for business recommendations will contribute to regaining the trust of Scottish businesses and strengthen the partnerships needed to unlock sustainable and inclusive growth.”

Those are the thoughts of just some businesses and organisations, but that positivity is replicated across all sectors, from developing the green economy to tackling poverty and beyond.

The motion is about opportunities, and I am excited and delighted to back the Government’s motion as we move ever more steadily towards being an independent country again.

17:10

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): This summer, across Europe, we have seen some of the most extreme weather events in history. It is clear to us all that we need deeper, faster action to tackle both the climate and nature emergencies. That is starting to come through now, with the work of this Government, particularly the programme for government and the forthcoming climate change plan.

For example, today’s launch by my colleague Lorna Slater of the biodiversity strategy and delivery plan will unlock huge investment in our land and seas that has not been seen in generations, while the heat in buildings strategy, led by my other colleague Patrick Harvie, will address the vast scale of change needed to make homes warmer, cheaper and low carbon.

I listened to some of the criticisms earlier from Brian Whittle, but, effectively, he is describing an enormous economic opportunity as a problem. He fails to grasp that it is the role of Governments to create new markets and to send clear signals to industry that there are markets that are investable and that can drive progress. That is exactly what this Government is doing. To be honest, who would not want to invest in the heat-pump market across the UK at the moment, because it is clear that it is going to have an incredibly strong future?

There is a need for a wider political reset involving all parties, especially after the wobble on climate policies that we saw across the political spectrum this summer. Therefore, I am really pleased that the First Minister has shown leadership and answered my call for a climate summit to allow us all to address challenges and opportunities together. Climate leadership and the desire for change are also building in our own communities. I also welcome this programme for government’s commitment to roll out climate action hubs, to help communities to lead the change themselves and to build up action programmes in areas such as home energy advice.

We know that a just and fair energy transition is critical to Scotland’s economic future. Offshore and onshore wind energy and solar power will be needed to supercharge our transition, provide secure green jobs and make Scotland a powerhouse of Europe’s green revolution. I highlight the role of onshore wind, because what has been achieved so far in Scotland has been truly remarkable. We have seen a doubling of renewable capacity in the past decade, led by onshore wind, but that needs to double again to meet our growing need to electrify transport and heating and to urgently decarbonise industry.

Sadly, projects have been stifled by long waiting times for consents, while modern, more efficient turbines have faced unnecessary planning hurdles. Therefore, a new sector deal for onshore wind is very welcome. It will help to speed up the consent process and deliver more critical certainty for business. Of course, it is a two-way street—where industry delivers economic growth, it should have a responsibility to share the rewards with communities that host developments. The wind industry also has a responsibility to work with Government to deliver those supply chain opportunities, skills and new jobs. We need that critical partnership.

The onshore wind sector deal will match the ambition with action, working in partnership with business, to drive Scotland forward to net zero. I contrast that with the anti-science, anti-green business position of the Westminster Government, which has effectively banned onshore wind farms

in England for a decade. Only two wind turbines were installed in England last year. That is an absolute disgrace, and it is wildly out of step with public opinion. There are young people in England who should have been leaving college and university to start jobs in the wind industry over the past decade, but they have had their career dreams destroyed by the actions of the Westminster Government. The decisions that are made today affect not only current jobs but future ones.

Going forward this year, we will not be taking lectures from the Tories about oil and gas. While they scaremonger about turning off the taps and mass jobs losses, the reality is that the SNP-Green Government values every dedicated worker in the oil and gas industry. We will not leave any oil and gas worker behind in this just transition.

However, given that nearly a quarter of our climate emissions now come from industry, that rapid and just transition needs to happen now, across all industrial sectors. Sites such as Mossmorran in my region in Fife offer exciting opportunities for workers and local communities. We need to get everybody around the table to achieve the just transition and to do it fast.

I welcome the progress that the Government has made around Grangemouth, working with industry on a just transition plan there. However, Mossmorran represents 10 per cent of Scotland's climate emissions. There are also cement works at Dunbar and other sites of point-source industrial emissions that, with the right partnership approach, could be delivering change and decarbonisation.

The United Nations secretary general has said that, with respect to climate, we need to be doing "everything, everywhere, all at once".

We cannot afford to hold back on progress. I will be looking critically at the green industrial strategy and the work that the Government is doing in the run-up to next summer. We need to move quickly on all these opportunities.

This is a programme for government that doubles down on the urgent action that is needed to tackle the climate and nature crises, while at the same time delivering the fair and prosperous economy that everybody deserves. I urge all members, if they can, to unite behind it.

17:16

Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con): I am pleased to support the amendment in the name of my colleague Murdo Fraser. I also welcome the language in the programme for government around economic growth, and I welcome that, on Tuesday, the First Minister emphasised the need

to work closely with local government partners to develop the local infrastructure and services that are required to deliver his pledges.

However, I am disappointed to see no mention of the importance of local government in the Government's motion. Perhaps that is not surprising considering the poor relationship that the Scottish Government has maintained with councils over the past 16 years.

Local government in Scotland is all about making a difference right here in our own backyard. It is about ensuring that our voices are heard, our needs are met and our communities thrive. It has been difficult for local government to deliver on those roles when it has been placed under such intense financial pressure over the past decade.

Kevin Stewart: Will Pam Gosal give way?

Pam Gosal: I have decided not to take an intervention. Why? Because for the past three days, we have been hearing from the Government benches, and it is about time that the SNP-Green Government listened. That is not its strong point. We know from the short-term lets group and the individuals who have gathered outside the Parliament that the Scottish Government refuses to listen, so I will carry on.

Councils find that they are constantly being asked to do more with less. The fact that the Scottish Government's budget has gone up by 8.3 per cent since 2014, but the local government budget has not seen a remotely similar uplift, serves to highlight that. The SNP often passes the buck to councils by forcing them to make difficult decisions about which services to cut or which taxes to raise. Recent warnings that some local authorities might not even have the funds to provide statutory services will come as no surprise to many, given that councils are set to make £300 million in cuts this year. That needs to change if local government is expected to help develop infrastructure, provide more services and help drive growth across the country.

The Scottish Conservatives have long been calling for councils to have more financial flexibility, so we welcome the intention of the new deal to do just that. However, without addressing the chronic underfunding of councils, this new deal is merely a reshuffling of the deckchairs. In an attempt to improve public finances, the SNP is now floating options that would make households poorer by increasing council tax by up to 22.5 per cent for around 750,000 households.

Instead, the Scottish Government should be encouraging local authorities to create growth and encourage productivity in their locality. As my colleague Liz Smith set out earlier this week, we desperately need a tax structure that encourages

productivity and boosts revenue, thus creating better public services; we do not want one that punishes ambition and enterprise. Scotland under the SNP is already the highest-taxed part of the United Kingdom, which shows that tax increases do not deliver better public services.

Instead, we need local government to be handed the power to drive growth. Let us give councils more control over the levers that drive growth, as Douglas Ross called for in our recent paper, "Grasping the thistle". Measures such as that are a sure-fire way to create more thriving communities.

So much potential growth can come from a reset in relations between local and national government. To deliver on that potential, we need a restructuring of our tax system and a focus on growing the economy and the tax base, and we need to give local government the opportunity to create growth and productivity.

17:21

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): I, too, welcome the opportunity to speak in the final debate on the new programme for government.

The wide-ranging measures that are outlined in the programme will reach our children through policies such as the Scottish child payment and the expansion of childcare provision, and they will reach our young people by taking action on the serious harm that is caused by single-use vapes and through supporting our renewables sector. While the UK Government continues to squeeze the life out of human rights protections, the Scottish Government works towards the introduction of a human rights bill. The measures are all timeous and much needed to mitigate the impact of the agent of chaos known as the UK Government, which is enabled by a sleepwalking Labour Party.

Today's motion focuses on the opportunities that the programme for government provides to grow an economy that has wellbeing at its heart. Although the notion of a wellbeing economy is a bit of a stretch for some people, I am particularly drawn to the principle of building an economic system that operates within safe environmental limits and in which success shifts beyond GDP growth alone to deliver shared wellbeing for generations to come.

Central to our transition to a wellbeing economy is business—a vehicle for innovation, with the potential to accelerate positive impact with partners, communities and Governments. For me, that was brought to life earlier this year at an event in the Scottish Parliament, when I listened to a young entrepreneur describe the opportunity that

Covid had presented to him to shift his business practice to one that was underpinned by wellbeing principles. He was happier, more fulfilled and more successful.

I spent much of the summer recess visiting many businesses in my constituency. For some, business is buoyant, thankfully, but others are struggling to cover their costs. Fabulous small businesses are losing heart. Therefore, I very much welcome the First Minister's commitment to develop a new and stronger relationship with business and to implement the recommendations that were made by the new deal for business group. In that regard, I ask the Scottish Government to ensure that there is a genuine commitment to the recommendation concerning the review of non-domestic rates policy reforms. I welcome the cabinet secretary's update on non-domestic rates in his speech, because it was a common theme of the issues that were raised with me.

I turn to the First Minister's announcement regarding a green industrial strategy. From my conversations with industry representatives over the past couple of days, I know that they recognise the limited powers that the Scottish Government has at its disposal, but they express considerable optimism regarding the strategy. They are particularly welcoming of the changes that have been announced to the consenting process for renewables technologies. Having raised in the chamber many times the issue of consenting timescales for offshore wind projects, I know that that will be very welcome across the sector.

I note that Scottish Renewables has also welcomed the Scottish Government's commitment to its energy strategy and just transition plan so that Scotland reaps the maximum possible benefit from the move to a clean energy system. I, too, welcome that commitment. As a north-east constituency MSP, I have regular conversations with renewables businesses that are keen to advance their investment and development opportunities in a space where nothing happens in isolation and many moving parts must align in order to support meaningful progress.

One of those moving parts is skills, the importance of which has been highlighted extensively in this afternoon's debate. I know from my conversations with industry representatives that there are challenges across the renewables sector that we are all grappling with when it comes to the development of our workforce of tomorrow. I welcome the update that the cabinet secretary gave on the talent attraction and migration plan and the investment unit, and I am keen to hear more about that.

The north-east hosts a huge breadth of creative work to develop our workforce, whether within our

fantastic further and higher education institutions, centres such as the Net Zero Technology Centre or the industry itself. I recently visited the new Hydrasun skills academy in my constituency and heard about its plans to offer courses to support people in making a skills transition.

However, only this morning, I spoke to a renewables company in the north-east that is struggling to recruit a project manager, so I am keen for the Scottish Government to ensure that skills development and workforce planning are front and centre of our energy strategy and just transition plan as we move forward.

I will conclude my contribution by welcoming the commitment to the £15 million plan to support the implementation of Mark Logan's review of our technology ecosystem and the development of a blueprint to make our colleges and universities stronger bases for entrepreneurs. I recently engaged with the Net Zero Technology Centre in Aberdeen regarding its ambition to develop an enhanced clean energy TechX acceleration programme as part of an energy transition cluster, and I welcome the cabinet secretary's recent positive response to my invitation to consider the opportunities that that offers.

I welcome the programme for government, and I urge all members to support the Government's motion.

The Presiding Officer: We move to the winding-up speeches.

17:27

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Before I turn to the content of the debate, I want to raise an issue that I had hoped would be raised—land reform. Land reform offers very clear opportunities to Scotland.

In his programme for government statement, the First Minister talked about “bold and radical” land reform, but he lacks a vision for that. Just 0.027 per cent of Scotland's population own 67 per cent of Scotland's land. That shows how much power and wealth are held in so few hands.

In his 1998 McEwen lecture, Donald Dewar said that land reform was not a one-off event, and the Jimmy Reid Foundation's paper on land reform by Calum MacLeod illustrated that. As well as looking at the history, it pushed for a radical approach to land reform.

The Scottish Government has said that it will introduce a public interest test for when land changes hands, but the 3,000 hectare trigger is timid and it means that virtually no land holdings in Scotland will ever face a public interest test.

The community right to buy is unworkable—there are far too many hurdles—and it needs to be updated. That could create huge opportunities for our communities. The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 sought to put urban communities on the same footing as rural communities, but there will not be a public interest test in that context. It is really important that that happens, because our towns and city centres are absolutely blighted and they need to have the same powers in their communities.

Peter Peacock and Mike Russell, both previous cabinet secretaries, joined forces this summer in calling for a radical approach and backing Mercedes Villalba's plan to implement a public interest test on the sale of land over 500 hectares. That has been backed by other organisations such as Community Land Scotland and the Jimmy Reid Foundation, both of which are offering support for such policies and solutions to our land ownership issues.

Murdo Fraser: Will Rhoda Grant give way?

Rhoda Grant: Briefly.

Murdo Fraser: Will Rhoda Grant confirm whether it is now Scottish Labour policy not to allow any landholding of more than 500 hectares?

Rhoda Grant: We are consulting on that. It must be very clear that there will be a public interest test. If it was in the public interest for larger parcels of land to change hands, of course that would take place, but if it was not in the public interest, as is very often the case, we would look to ensure that that did not happen, because it can be a dead hand on both rural and urban communities.

I turn to the wider debate and echo the points made by my colleague Daniel Johnson. He welcomed the pay rise for care workers but was very clear that this has come three years too late. Had workers received that pay rise three years ago, they would be far better paid now. Another part of the First Minister's statement that slightly confused me was that he spoke about that pay rise being for directly paid care workers. We want to see all care workers receiving £12 an hour and to see that being increased to £15 an hour. That is absolutely affordable. We are wasting huge amounts of money on agency workers and lining the pockets of agencies that charge twice as much as care workers would receive anywhere else.

Jim Fairlie talked about the importance of childcare, a point that has been echoed by the Scottish Chambers of Commerce. We agree that that is hugely important, but how is it going to be delivered? People in rural areas already have the right to childcare but cannot access any childcare, which means that rural areas lose out on childcare, on homes and on jobs.

I turn to the issue of jobs and skills, as raised by Daniel Johnson, and to the importance of skilling young people to be able to take up the jobs that are available. That applies not only to young people: we need to upskill older people as well. If we are to have a just transition, we must ensure that everyone is skilled to take up the jobs at hand. Pam Duncan-Glancy spoke about the importance of education in raising people out of poverty and about the opportunities that we are missing. There have been promises about free school meals, class sizes and the Erasmus programme, all of which our people are missing out on.

Scottish Labour is committed to the creation of GB Energy, which will deal with our energy supply and issues such as those in the supply chain that Willie Rennie talked about. We are missing out on ScotWind and the development of green hydrogen, as Brian Whittle said.

The SNP's programme for government is one of contracting, not expanding, ambition, as we can see when we look at plans for the A9 and A96. Even Ivan McKee highlighted that lack of delivery. Scottish Labour has a vision to transform Scotland and will grasp every opportunity to do so. We will pay care workers the fair rate for the job, tackle climate change and create a public energy company—

The Presiding Officer: Please conclude, Ms Grant.

Rhoda Grant: —to be headquartered in Scotland, and we will stay true to Donald Dewar's vision of bringing greater diversity to land ownership.

17:33

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): I welcome this debate on the programme for government and on the opportunities before us in Scotland. We have heard many good contributions. I hope that the cabinet secretary has listened to some of the concerns that have been shared here today, and by stakeholders, many of whom I have met in the past couple of months.

Yesterday, I attended the Offshore Europe conference in Aberdeen and met oil and gas workers and leaders who are increasingly concerned by this SNP-Green devolved Government's lack of interest in the sector. There was not one mention of oil and gas in the programme for government and only a passing reference in the First Minister's speech. The main message that I took away from the conference and want to convey to the Government is that hostility to the oil and gas sector is harming the supply chain.

Larger energy companies are choosing to invest in other areas around the world. That is having a knock-on effect on the supply chain, which is vital for our transition. We cannot have a just transition from oil and gas to renewables if we kill off the supply chain. Only the Scottish Conservatives are standing up for the oil and gas sector in the north-east of Scotland—and the oil and gas sector knows that.

Kevin Stewart: Mr Lumsden paints a picture that is entirely wrong. We recognise that the current Conservative mantra is "Drill, baby, drill." However, we want to ensure that we have a just transition and create green jobs, while recognising that we will still need oil and gas in the future. I share the First Minister's ambition of making Aberdeen the world's global renewal energy capital. I wish Douglas Lumsden had such positivity.

Douglas Lumsden: I do not know whether Kevin Stewart has gone offshore. If he had, he would have learned that the Government's actions are killing off the energy industry in Aberdeen. Without a supply chain, there will be no transition, and that is the path that we are going down.

The programme for government could have been titled "A failure of Government", given the number of broken promises that it represents. There is failure to dual the A9 or to set a timetable for the work to be completed. There is failure to dual the A96, to eliminate the attainment gap, to build ferries, to protect our rural communities, and failure to grow our economy in line with the rest of the UK. I could go on, but time is limited.

My colleagues have highlighted only some of the impacts that those failures have meant for our communities—

The Presiding Officer: Mr Lumsden, please give me a moment. I am hearing comments—some of which are certainly discourteous—being shouted across the chamber. I ask members to cease.

Douglas Lumsden: Thank you, Presiding Officer; maybe they do not like what they are hearing.

I will turn to some of the comments that have been made in today's debate. Pam Gosal was right to highlight that local government is not mentioned in the Government motion today. Local government is at the heart of our communities, but the Government often treats it badly. Stop the cuts should be the slogan for the programme for government.

Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Douglas Lumsden: No, I will not.

The Government should stop cutting libraries, stop cutting sport facilities and stop cutting vital services.

The Government talks about early intervention and prevention, but the savage cuts to local government are making things worse; Brian Whittle also made that point. Fewer public sporting facilities will mean higher levels of obesity and more cost to our NHS. Daniel Johnson was right to say that the economic data is stark. We are lagging behind. Value added tax registered businesses are down and job creation is down.

Willie Rennie described the programme as “uninspiring”, and I completely agree, but his most important point is that there is no clarity for farmers on climate targets. That must come urgently.

As Murdo Fraser highlighted, the Scottish Conservative Party is the only party that is offering a clear vision for the economic future of Scotland within a strong United Kingdom; a United Kingdom that has recovered faster than any other European nation following Covid, and with strong growth. This week, the First Minister said that the SNP is pro-growth, yet we know that its tail-wagging coalition partner is anti-growth. The Scottish public is under no illusion about who is pulling the strings, and it knows that independence is top of the SNP’s agenda, not the wellbeing and livelihoods of hard-working Scots.

The programme for government is not ambitious, it is not forward thinking, it does not offer solutions and it does not even offer a vision for Scotland. It only offers some mitigation for 16 years of an SNP Government.

Last week, the Scottish Conservative Party set out its vision for the future of Scotland. It is a vision where we work hand in hand with the UK Government to deliver economic growth for our country and a national workforce plan to align skills to our education opportunities.

We will put emphasis on lifelong learning and work with partners to provide more rural housing in areas that face depopulation. We will tackle long-term health issues, including by setting up a network of long-Covid clinics—an issue that the Government has failed to address. We will review business taxation to ensure that it is fair and flexible, and we will build a network of regional clusters of excellence to build international excellence in goods and services. That is how we will lift people out of the poverty caused by the failures of the SNP Government.

That is a vision for Scotland. However, instead of getting that, we have the same old tired and worn-out rhetoric of a First Minister who has no ideas and no vision and who is just a poor imitation of what went before. He is the continuity

candidate who offers a Government that continuously fails to address the needs of Scottish business, Scottish schools and our health service; that fails to listen to the concerns that are expressed by businesses up and down Scotland, whether in our drinks industry or our short-term lets industry; that lacks ideas and vision; and that can only ever prioritise independence, to the detriment of everything else.

What we have seen over the past few days has shown the SNP-Green Government to be failing in its duty to serve the people of Scotland through working with the UK Government to bring investment and support to our business sector. It has failed in its duty to deliver for our children and young people through better education and closing the attainment gap. It has failed in its duty to deliver world-class healthcare—given that one in seven Scots is on a NHS waiting list. This programme for government does nothing to address those failures, and the people of Scotland deserve better.

The Presiding Officer: I call Màiri McAllan to wind up the debate, for up to nine minutes.

17:41

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Net Zero and Just Transition (Màiri McAllan): I am left wondering where on earth Douglas Lumsden summons the negativity from to deliver such a closing speech.

We have had a wide-ranging debate, and I absolutely welcome the breadth of topics that have been covered. However, as net zero secretary, I make no apology for opening my remarks by covering the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss, which are global challenges of existential proportions. I believe that tackling them is the fight of our generation and of generations to come.

Of course, as Mark Ruskell reflected on, the challenge is not remote or far off. July this year has been confirmed as the hottest month in global records, and it is likely that 2023 will be confirmed as the hottest year ever recorded, while scientists label as “extreme” the marine heatwave that is currently encircling the UK and Ireland.

We see the devastating impacts of those matters. In recent times alone, a third of Pakistan has been submerged in floodwater, with all the associated loss and damage; drought has ripped across the Horn of Africa, spreading acute hunger; cyclones are devastating Malawi; and fires are ripping through Hawaii. Last year, in a discussion with international colleagues, I heard about how low-lying nations are creating digital back-ups of their entire existence and culture, for fear that, one day, they will not exist.

The injustice at the heart of climate change is that those communities that have done so little to contribute to the industrial processes that have caused climatic breakdown are suffering from it first and worst.

That is why I am proud of the programme for government's commitment on the delivery of our climate just communities programme, which will support resilience at a community level in our partner countries, and it is why the Government will advocate at the 28th UN climate change conference of the parties—COP28—for concrete progress on loss and damage. I look forward to discussing those matters at the summit that the First Minister and I will host with key stakeholders in advance of COP28.

Daniel Johnson: Forgive me for making a somewhat esoteric point, but we need to reflect on our privilege and advantage in living at our degree of latitude and in a maritime climate. In the future, we will have to think about that inequality and how we honour that as we think about the challenges that people face in the countries that the cabinet secretary has mentioned. Does she think that we all should reflect on that?

Màiri McAllan: Absolutely. Please forgive me if I am wrong, but I hope that Daniel Johnson was not suggesting that we ought to focus more on issues at home.

Daniel Johnson: No, it was a broader point.

Màiri McAllan: Absolutely. It is a broader point.

As Scotland positions itself as a leader in international climate justice, we are also determinedly leading action at home to tackle climate change and restore nature here, not least through our cornerstone programme for government commitment to a climate change plan that will look right across our economy and society, with bold action in transport, heat, industry, our natural environment and more and set a pathway to take Scotland through its climate targets, which, I remind members, are still world leading and which every party in the Parliament voted for. I look forward to their co-operation in the actions that we have to take to meet them.

Brian Whittle: We accept that you have world-leading targets—the problem is that you keep missing them. And every time that you miss them, it means that our contribution to keeping global temperature below 1.5°C is missing. You cannot have a target if you do not have a route map to get there.

The Presiding Officer: Always through the chair, Mr Whittle.

Màiri McAllan: In that regard, I look forward to Brian Whittle's enthusiastic support of the

Government's heat decarbonisation programme when we bring it forward.

That is challenge covered, but where there is challenge, there is opportunity. Tackling the climate and nature emergencies is a moral and environmental imperative, but it also one of the most significant economic opportunities that Scotland has in front of it. We have opportunities that, frankly, other countries would dearly love and which this Government is determined to seize. I want to come back to those if I can, although I am conscious of time. Before I do, though, I want to focus a little bit on the interconnectedness of climate change and economic prosperity.

The summer was punctuated with horrific scenes of fires, floods and droughts across the world. Almost side by side with that on the front pages of some papers, we saw the unedifying spectacle of the Tories and Labour almost competing to ditch their climate commitments. Admittedly, the UK Government is starting from a low base. That is perfectly summed up by its perverse opposition—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear the cabinet secretary.

Màiri McAllan: —to onshore wind on the one hand while it fights to open coal mines on the other. There is also of course its complete failure to compete with the US on the Inflation Reduction Act. It is also why, I think, the Scottish Tories have stood in the way of so many of the projects that we have tried to bring forward in this Parliament, from recycling schemes to low-emission zones and new heating standards. We might expect that from the Tories, but Labour has also been shape-shifting and flip-flopping, and I take no pleasure in watching that happen.

This summer, pictures of climactic breakdown all around the world filled our screens—of people losing everything, up to and including their lives. Almost side by side with that, we saw Keir Starmer and his branch office colleagues in Scotland lining up to systematically abandon what were once their climate commitments. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: If you could give me a moment, cabinet secretary.

I am aware of conversations going on across the chamber. I would be grateful if members could treat one another with courtesy and respect.

Màiri McAllan: I am happy to take interventions if they want to debate.

This is the same Labour Party that has recently confirmed that it now supports the bedroom tax, that it will not scrap the rape clause and that it wishes to emulate Tory fiscal regimes.

Sarah Boyack: The cabinet secretary is criticising us, yet in our speeches we called on the Government to actually implement its climate policies. We are not rolling back from them, whether in relation to heating our homes, our transport, our buildings or how we use our energy. This is just criticism—and it is not good enough.

Màiri McAllan: I point Sarah Boyack to the £28 billion hole in her shadow chancellor's plans. *[Interruption.]* Your green investment policy has been dropped.

The Presiding Officer: Through the chair, please.

Màiri McAllan: You no longer support ultra-low-emission zones, while the Scottish Government is bringing them in in Scotland.

Of course, this is the same Labour Party that has accused this Government of focusing too much on social policy, which was absurdly repeated by Daniel Johnson today. That is social policy that is lifting 90,000 children in Scotland out of poverty.

Daniel Johnson: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Màiri McAllan: I will give way one last time, but I am very conscious of time.

Daniel Johnson: Does the cabinet secretary not recognise the fundamental point that we can deliver that social policy only if we have credible and robust economic policy? And does it not say everything that we need to know about her and her Government that she prefers to attack the Labour Party rather than the Tory party? *[Interruption.]* We need to get rid of the Tories in London and replace them, but you prefer to have them exactly where they are, don't you? *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Members! *[Interruption.]* Members! Let us hear one another.

Màiri McAllan: I think that the 90,000 children who are no longer living in poverty because of this Government recognise that we can do both. *[Interruption.]* How long do I have, Presiding Officer?

The Presiding Officer: Up to nine minutes.

Màiri McAllan: Thank you, Presiding Officer. I will conclude shortly.

I will finish with a point on opportunity. Perhaps one of the greatest opportunities that Scotland has is our energy transition. Oil and gas has been, and continues to be, a very important part of our economy and our society, but, equally, as we stand on the precipice of a renewables revolution in Scotland, the question for the people of Scotland is who they want to oversee that

transition and the eventual benefits of it. Is it, as it has been for decades since we discovered oil, the UK Government? Do we want to continue to send our energy wealth down through the UK Treasury and see a pittance come back or—if Labour has its way—a brass plaque on an office somewhere in Scotland, or do we want to take those powers into our own hands and ensure that the benefits are reaped in communities throughout Scotland? I know which I would prefer.

Business Motion

17:50

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-10379, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on changes to the business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees to the following revisions to the programme of business for—

(a) Tuesday 12 September 2023—

delete

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Fiscal Framework Review

and insert

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Celebrating the Resilience of Scotland's Food and Drink Sector

(b) Thursday 14 September 2023—

delete

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Celebrating the Resilience of Scotland's Food and Drink Sector

and insert

followed by Scottish Government Debate.—[George Adam]

Motion agreed to.

Decision Time

17:51

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business.

The first question is, that motion S6M-10350, in the name of Humza Yousaf, on a motion of condolence for Winnie Ewing, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament expresses its deep sadness at the death of Winnie Ewing; offers its sympathy and condolences to her family and friends; recognises the historic place she will hold in Scottish political life having served in three Parliaments as a result of her victory in the 1967 Hamilton by-election, her election as an MEP, and as an MSP, where she presided over the reconvening of the Scottish Parliament; further recognises the high esteem in which she was held by colleagues from all parties, and appreciates her contribution as a principled public servant dedicated to the people of Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: I remind members that if the amendment in the name of Murdo Fraser is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Daniel Johnson will fall. The next question is, that amendment S6M-10347.1, in the name of Murdo Fraser, which seeks to amend motion S6M-10347, in the name of Neil Gray, on opportunity within the 2023-24 programme for government, 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.

17:51

Meeting suspended.

17:54

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Murdo Fraser is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Daniel Johnson will fall.

Members should cast their votes now.

For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)

Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

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)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (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)
 Dorman, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 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)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)

Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-10347.1, in the name of Murdo Fraser, is: For 30, Against 88, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-10347.2, in the name of Daniel Johnson, which seeks to amend motion S6M-10347, in the name of Neil Gray, on opportunity in the 2023-24 programme for government, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

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

The vote is closed.

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app is not working. I would have voted no.

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

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

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)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 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)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 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)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 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)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 19, Against 99, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S6M-10347, in the name of Neil Gray, on opportunity in the 2023-24 programme for government, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

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

The vote is closed.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app would not refresh. I would have abstained.

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

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)

Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Abstentions

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 66, Against 33, Abstentions 19.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises the actions set out in the Programme for Government 2023-24 to build a fair, green and growing wellbeing economy, while addressing the twin

climate and nature emergencies; agrees that a fair work agenda and a real living wage support all of society, particularly during a cost of living crisis, and commends the proposed rise for workers in social care and childcare to £12 an hour; believes that tackling the global climate emergency is the defining challenge of current times and that the necessity of climate leadership could not be more stark, and commends the Scottish Government's investment of £2.2 billion in 2023-24 to deliver a just transition to net zero and restore nature, which brings co-benefits in improved health outcomes, more accessible places, and empowered communities; acknowledges that the implementation of the recommendations of the New Deal for Business Group, close working with small businesses, and a £15 million package to support enterprise and entrepreneurship will create new opportunities to start, scale and sustain businesses; agrees that this support, along with the Scottish Government's Green Industrial and Energy strategies, will ensure that businesses maximise the opportunities of a just transition to net zero; recognises the work of the Just Transition Fund, enabling pioneering work in a range of sectors, as well as the Scottish Government's investment in nature restoration, and looks forward to initiatives to establish a new national park, as well as the publication of Scotland's Biodiversity Strategy; welcomes the commitment to establish a sector deal with the onshore wind industry, including halving the average determination time for section 36 applications to 12 months where there is no public inquiry, and acknowledges that both the Climate Change and Just Transition plans will secure a climate resilient and biodiverse future in a way that maximises community benefit and is fair and just for everyone.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Meeting closed at 17:59.

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

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