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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 21 December 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.

Short-term Let Licensing Scheme (Self-catering Properties)

1. **Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the small business minister has had with ministerial colleagues regarding an assessment of the total number of self-catering properties in Scotland since the introduction of its short-term let licensing scheme. (S6O-02918)

The Minister for Small Business, Innovation, Tourism and Trade (Richard Lochhead): The introduction of short-term let licensing in Scotland means that data is now being collected on the numbers of short-term lets, including how many are self-catering. The Scottish Government is publishing quarterly statistics about that data, providing the number and status of licence applications, the number of licences in operation and additional information such as location. The latest publication was back on 20 November, and covered the quarter ending on 30 June 2023.

As small business minister, I have liaised closely with my ministerial colleagues across other portfolio areas, including tourism, about short-term let licensing. An update will be provided to Parliament on its implementation in early 2024.

Finlay Carson: Scotland's self-catering businesses play an integral role in its tourism sector, generating in the region of £1 billion, and they are undeniably a vital part of the economy in rural areas such as mine. However, the introduction of numerous new regulations has dented confidence and done little to support that vital industry. Does the minister agree that the Scottish Government should not seek to reduce short-term holiday lets as a means of solving current rural housing challenges, but should focus instead on understanding rural housing needs and building more affordable homes—a budget that was slashed in the budget this week?

Richard Lochhead: Finlay Carson has raised so many different issues that I am trying to work out where to start.

I will start with a point of agreement, which is that the self-catering sector absolutely plays an integral role in Scotland's tourism offering and our local economies. As for where technology such as Airbnb and so on and so forth has taken us in relation to tourism, Finlay Carson will be aware that many countries and cities across the world have been reviewing their regulation on self-catering and short-term lets. I hope that he agrees that it is necessary to do that.

We are paying very close attention to the trends in Scotland. As I have said to Finlay Carson, the Government has pledged to bring forward an update on implementation in early 2024. We will, of course, look at any issues that have arisen at that point. The latest statistics will also be published in due course, which will give us a better picture of where things are.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): The minister will not be surprised to hear that the introduction of short-term lets legislation has presented particular challenges in island communities such as the one that I represent. In some of the smaller isles in particular, it could see the removal of any accommodation, which is integral not only to the tourism sector but also to public sector workers and tradespeople who are out visiting and undertaking work. As the minister takes forward the review that he talked about in relation to the statistics, will he keep an open mind on the possibility of introducing a degree of extra flexibility in the way in which the legislation operates in our island communities?

Richard Lochhead: I thank Liam McArthur for raising that point. Of course, I am looking at the issue from a small business and tourism perspective. My colleague Paul McLennan, the Minister for Housing, will bring forward the update on implementation in early 2024, as has been pledged.

A variety of issues arising from Liam McArthur's question affects the island communities in his Orkney constituency, such as the need to make more affordable housing available. A number of measures have been taken by the Government in relation to second homes and so on and so forth, to try and address some of the pressures that are affecting our island and rural communities. That, too, has had a knock-on impact for key workers.

Just last week, Paul McLennan and I held a summit in Pitlochry with a number of businesses and organisations from across the Highlands and Islands—and, indeed, the south of Scotland—to discuss the pressure on key worker housing and affordable housing in rural areas and the impact on local economies. I assure Liam McArthur that those issues are at the top of our agenda.

The Presiding Officer: Question 2 was not lodged.

Loss and Damage (Marginalised Communities)

3. Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the steps that it is taking to tackle loss and damage in marginalised communities. (S6O-02920)

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Net Zero and Just Transition (Màiri McAllan): The loss and damage being experienced in communities throughout the world are perhaps the single greatest injustice at the heart of the climate crisis. The Scottish Government has now pledged a total of £10 million to address loss and damage in climate-vulnerable communities. Our initial pledges have been mobilised in programmes directly in the Pacific, in Bangladesh and in Malawi, and we have begun work on operationalising the funding that was announced by the First Minister in September in relation to Kenya, Ethiopia, Pakistan and Zambia. All our programmes take a participatory approach, which means that we consult directly with communities and look to support the most vulnerable people in the most vulnerable communities.

Colin Beattie: It is encouraging to see that the Scottish Government is committed to making the loss and damage fund a success and that Scotland has played an important part in the work that is being done. Can the cabinet secretary say any more about what steps the Scottish Government can take to encourage other countries to commit the finance that is needed to address the challenge that is faced?

Màiri McAllan: Scotland's membership of international and regional fora such as the under2 coalition, of which we are the European co-chair, allows us to demonstrate the action that we have taken and to encourage our colleagues to take action on loss and damage. In addition to that, through the practical action that we are taking, we have helped leverage funding from philanthropic organisations, such as the match funding that we received from the Open Society Foundations for our non-economic loss and damage programme.

Ultimately, Scotland's action at the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26—to stand beside the global south, which has been campaigning on the issue for three decades, and to help break the impasse on loss and damage, has since seen pledges to the tune of \$700 million unlocked for that specific issue. That is to be welcomed, but when we consider the need and the number of recipients throughout the world, we can see that that number has to increase, and quickly.

Winter Mountain Safety

4. Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what recent engagement it has had with Scottish Mountain Rescue teams regarding mountain safety this winter. (S6O-02921)

The Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport (Maree Todd): Winter in Scotland's hills and mountains offers incredible experiences that allow people to enjoy the outdoors and reap the physical and mental wellbeing benefits of doing so. The Scottish Government continues to engage regularly with the chair of Scottish Mountain Rescue and the spokesman for the three independent teams at Glencoe, Lochaber and Cairngorm on a range of issues affecting mountain rescue teams across Scotland.

We are supportive of this year's #thinkwinter campaign, which was recently launched. The campaign encourages people to plan ahead and to think about winter conditions before heading out into the hills, and provides an online resource with links to all the information needed for exceptional mountain adventures.

Liz Smith: I also welcome that campaign.

Improving accessibility and the use of technology have considerably increased the number of people visiting Scotland's mountains, which is a good thing, but, unsurprisingly, it has led to an increasing number of emergency call-outs for injured and lost walkers. There were 698 in 2021 and 709 in 2022, which, alarmingly, represent an increase on pre-pandemic levels of about 30 per cent. What is the Scottish Government doing to ensure the sustainability of the service and to support its members, most of whom are volunteers, so that they can continue to provide their life-saving service?

Maree Todd: First, I agree with Liz Smith: this is a life-saving service that is provided largely by volunteers with a passion for the mountains. I am grateful for that. It also helps us with critical incidents, and was crucial in the response to the recent storms in the east of our country. It is a really incredible service.

In order to support the service, we provide an annual grant of £312,000 to Scottish Mountain Rescue. Further, sportscotland invests more than £2 million in the safety of mountain users, including approximately £1,635,000 for Glenmore Lodge and some £379,000 for the sportscotland avalanche information service. We also help co-ordinate all the interested stakeholders beyond the mountain rescue teams.

As Liz Smith has said, there has been a rise in the number of people enjoying our mountains in

various ways, from mountain biking to skiing. We are keen to support that to happen safely.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Question 5 has been withdrawn and question 6 was not lodged.

Budget (East Kilbride)

7. Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how its budget will affect East Kilbride. (S6O-02924)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Shona Robison): The Scottish budget has been set in difficult circumstances, in which we are having to deal with a 1.2 per cent real-terms decrease in our block grant since 2022-23. That has forced us to make difficult decisions and prioritise what really matters.

East Kilbride communities will benefit from the increased investment in the national health service, the additional £1 billion that we are investing in social security benefits, the increased funding for our police and fire services, and record funding to local government—a 6 per cent increase from last year's budget—including additional investment to fund a council tax freeze. Those are the choices that we have made to support people and public services across Scotland.

Collette Stevenson: Thirteen years of Tory austerity have eroded funding for public services. On top of that, Scotland is still paying off Labour's dodgy private finance initiative deals, including that for Hairmyres hospital in East Kilbride, which cost £68 million to build over 20 years ago. The PFI debt is £28.7 million this year and will be £29 million next year, with total repayment exceeding £700 million. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear Ms Stevenson.

Collette Stevenson: In the face of those budget constraints caused by the Labour Party and the Conservative Party, can the Deputy First Minister set out the benefits of the Scottish National Party Government's progressive income tax policies, including for spending on vital public services, such as our NHS?

Shona Robison: In stark contrast to the Opposition—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Members! Let us hear one another.

Shona Robison: They do not like to hear it, Presiding Officer.

In stark contrast to the Opposition parties, the Government is fully committed to the principle of

progressive taxation and to continuing to support our social contract with the people of Scotland. The Scottish Fiscal Commission has estimated that our income tax policy choices since devolution will raise roughly an additional £1.5 billion in 2024-25 compared with what would have been raised, had we matched United Kingdom Government policy. As a result of our progressive approach, we can continue to provide a wide range of services and social security payments that are not provided elsewhere in the UK, such as our flagship Scottish child payment, free prescriptions and free higher education, to benefit our society and people across the country.

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): Strathclyde Partnership for Transport works across the region, including in East Kilbride, but the Deputy First Minister has just slashed its general capital support grant to nothing. That money funds engineering works, bus station works, bus stops and shelters, bus infrastructure and the decarbonisation of the fleet, and it supports councils in delivering active travel. Does the Deputy First Minister agree with the SPT's chair and SNP councillor Stephen Dornan, who has said that this is completely unacceptable?

Shona Robison: Graham Simpson comes here with crocodile tears. His Government has cut capital funding by 10 per cent over the next five years. If he cares about our infrastructure, he would be making representations to his own Tory Government about such cuts.

We have had to take difficult decisions. In doing so, we have taken into account the reserves that are held by organisations such as SPT. We will continue to work with organisations, but if they have reserves, they are, of course, taken into account in our budget decisions.

Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP): Given the cabinet secretary's reference to the general impacts of the budget and taking into account the proposed increase in the capital budget for health, can the cabinet secretary confirm that a new medical centre for Lochgelly was promised by the Scottish Government way back in 2011? Surely, therefore, the cabinet secretary must agree with my constituents that it should be Lochgelly's turn now.

Shona Robison: Our investment in health infrastructure and front-line health services is, of course, of key importance. I said in response to questions on the budget statement on Tuesday that I would come back in the spring to set out our investment pipeline, based on those priorities but also taking into account the capital cuts from the UK Government, which will have an impact on infrastructure. However, I am happy to continue to engage with Annabelle Ewing and will ensure that

I update her in due course on the particular facility that she has referred to.

Scotgold Resources Ltd

8. **Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with Scotgold Resources Ltd regarding any support that can be provided to employees who may lose their jobs at its Cononish gold mine near Tyntrum, in light of the reported announcement that the company has gone into administration. (S6O-02925)

The Minister for Small Business, Innovation, Tourism and Trade (Richard Lochhead): Following a petition to wind up, as it is referred to, the Scottish Government's partnership action for continuing employment team, known as PACE, contacted Scotgold Resources Ltd to offer PACE support to any employees who might be facing redundancy.

Through providing skills development and employability support, PACE aims to minimise the amount of time that individuals affected by redundancy are out of work. The owners have appointed administrators Pitcher Partners in Australia, which our PACE team has also contacted, and PACE stands ready to support workers in that situation and in other redundancy situations. The service can be accessed through Skills Development Scotland's online services offer, and at SDS centres, for anyone who is looking for redundancy-related advice.

Evelyn Tweed: I have been contacted by an employee of Scotgold Resources who, despite being told that they are entitled to resign and claim redundancy, has not been paid. What actions can those 80 employees take to ensure that they receive the remuneration to which they are entitled?

Richard Lochhead: I think that we would want to agree at the outset that the Scottish Government wants everyone who is made redundant to receive all moneys that are owed to them, and I hope that the situation is resolved as soon as possible. It is, however, a matter for the administrator.

Responsibility for dealing with employee claims in insolvency is reserved to the United Kingdom Government and is dealt with by the redundancy payments service. If the employer is no longer trading but has not registered as insolvent, individuals might be able either to make a claim to an employment tribunal or, if their employer registers as insolvent later in the process, to contact the redundancy payment service. Individuals can also access free advice on their options through the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service helpline.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes general questions.

11:57

Meeting suspended.

12:00

On resuming—

First Minister's Question Time

Budget (Taxation)

1. Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Today marks 35 years since the bombing of Pan Am flight 103, which killed 270 innocent people. My thoughts and prayers and, I am sure, those of the whole chamber are with their families and friends, and with those in the Lockerbie community who fell victim to that senseless act of terror.

This week, the Scottish National Party's budget has led to everyone in Scotland who earns more than £28,850 paying more tax than workers south of the border. In total, 1.5 million Scots will pay more than people doing exactly the same jobs elsewhere in the United Kingdom. Does Humza Yousaf think that it is fair that a majority of Scots will pay more tax than people south of the border who earn the same wage?

The First Minister (Humza Yousaf): I add my thoughts and my prayers for all those who continue to feel the impact of the tragic and terrible terrorist attack in Lockerbie on 21 December 1988. This year marks the 35th anniversary of that attack. I spoke to David Mundell this week; we both reflected on the incredible courage that we saw not just from the emergency services, but from the local communities. Many of those people are not named and their stories are not known, but through their courageous action they ensured that there is an enduring bond between families who were impacted in Scotland and those in the United States and around the world. My thoughts continue to be with all those who feel that loss.

In relation to issues around the budget, first and foremost let me make it absolutely abundantly clear that the majority of people in Scotland will pay less tax than people in the rest of the United Kingdom. There are no ifs, no buts and no maybes about that.

The budget, at its very heart, is about values. The Conservative Party, in its autumn statement, chose to give people who are on higher salaries, like Douglas Ross, a tax cut of £754. In contrast, we are asking the top 5 per cent—the highest earners, like Douglas Ross—to pay a little more in tax. By doing so, we are able to give our national health service an uplift of over £500 million. That is a real-terms increase for our NHS, while the Conservative Party has cut funding for the NHS in England.

We will prioritise an uplift to the NHS, an uplift to education—

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Briefly, First Minister.

The First Minister: —and an uplift to Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. The Conservatives have prioritised a tax cut for the wealthiest people, like Douglas Ross. Those are not values that I believe in, and I do not believe that they are values that Scotland believes in, either.

Douglas Ross: At its heart, the SNP's budget is about Scots paying more and getting less. That is what is going to happen as a result of the budget. The SNP tax hikes on Scottish workers will damage our economy, and they risk forcing highly skilled valuable workers out of Scotland.

The First Minister: Not true.

Douglas Ross: The First Minister says that that is "Not true"—[*Interruption.*]—and he is repeating it. Let me read to the First Minister what Iain Kennedy, the chairman of the British Medical Association's Scottish council, said. The quote is:

"One of the unintended consequences of this measure may push more of these doctors out of the NHS to jobs elsewhere or retirement—or force them to cut overtime."

We could lose nurses, doctors and specialist NHS staff for good. Does Humza Yousaf accept that his tax rises could force key workers out of Scotland's NHS?

The First Minister: It is awfully brave—that is one word for it—for Douglas Ross to talk about the NHS during the week in which junior doctor strikes are happening in NHS England but not in NHS Scotland. Not only that, but the choices that we have made in the budget ensure that there is a real-terms increase to NHS spending in Scotland, when there is a real-terms cut to the NHS in England because of the choices that the Conservatives have made.

Every time that we ensure that we have progressive taxation in Scotland, Douglas Ross stands up and suggests that there will be some kind of mass exodus from Scotland. However, the statistics simply do not bear that out. National Records of Scotland statistics from 2021 show that 56,000 people came to Scotland from the rest of the UK, which is a net in-migration of almost 10,000 people. Why are they coming here? Because in Scotland, they get free university education, free childcare, free school meals and free nursing and personal care. Those are the choices that we are making. Do you know what else they get? We have, in Scotland, the best paid nurses—they are better paid than nurses anywhere else in the UK.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, First Minister.

The First Minister: No wonder we have not lost a single day to strike action in the NHS in Scotland.

Douglas Ross: I simply quoted the chairman of the BMA in Scotland, and we get a rant from the First minister. Let us be very clear: the UK Government is providing the highest-ever level of funding to the Scottish Government. Tight budgets are purely the SNP's fault for wasting taxpayers' money. [*Laughter.*] SNP members laugh. It would be funny if it was not so serious—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Members! Let us hear Mr Ross.

Douglas Ross: There has been wastage from the SNP Government on ferries that do not float, doomed court cases and ivy league degrees for water executives, before we even start on the bar bill. As a consequence of the SNP's decisions, shops, pubs and hotels in Scotland will not get the same rates relief as businesses in England and Wales. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy First Minister is trying to shout down my question about hospitality—

The Presiding Officer: Mr Ross!

I would be grateful if all members could resist the temptation to contribute when they have not been called to speak. Members on the front benches have a particular responsibility to lead by example. Of course, every member of the Parliament has a role to play in that good behaviour.

Douglas Ross: I have to say that the smug smirk from Michael Matheson and other members on the front bench is really disappointing.

As a consequence of SNP decisions this week, shops, pubs and hotels in Scotland will not get the same rates relief as businesses in England and Wales.

The Scottish Hospitality Group said that

“many Scottish hospitality businesses will struggle to survive, and customers will see prices increase”

because of that. The Scottish Grocers' Federation said that

“it beggars belief that the Scottish Government has once again failed to pass on the 75% relief for retail, seen elsewhere in the UK.”

Why is the SNP putting Scottish businesses at a disadvantage?

The First Minister: This is why Douglas Ross has no credibility whatsoever when it comes to economic matters. Not only did he demand previously that we imitate and copy Tory tax cuts, which would have meant that we would have had £1.5 billion less to spend on vital public services, but he demands now that we spend every penny

of UK Government consequential on business relief and tax cuts. If we had done that, we would have seen real-terms cuts to the NHS, education, the police service and the fire service. We simply will not choose to do that.

If we had spent the paltry £10.8 million that the UK Government allocated for health consequential in its autumn statement, that would have funded five hours of NHS Scotland activity. We make different choices in Scotland. Why? It is because our policies mean that although we ask the top 5 per cent to pay a little more in tax, they get more for it. We will simply not copy Tory tax cuts for the wealthy at the expense of our public services.

Douglas Ross: Last week, we heard a bold claim from an SNP cabinet secretary that world leaders were lining up to get advice from the SNP Government. It got me wondering who has been calling for the advice. Has Justin Trudeau been on the phone looking for a camper van? Maybe Emmanuel Macron is calling the health secretary to hear how to stream the Celtic match from Morocco. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Members!

Douglas Ross: Maybe Joe Biden is asking for advice on how to deal with a disastrous predecessor at the heart of a criminal investigation. I do not know. It could have been any of those things.

Of course, world leaders will not have been asking the nats how to build ferries or how to run an education system. They definitely will not have been asking Humza Yousaf for economic advice, because he is making hard-working Scots pick up the bill for his mistakes. He is putting Scottish businesses at a competitive disadvantage. He is driving key NHS staff away and his decisions mean that 1.5 million Scots will pay more than people south of the border. Is that all that Scotland can expect from high-tax Humza?

The Presiding Officer: Mr Ross, it is very important that members address one another courteously, which means using first names and surnames and avoiding other such names.

The First Minister: The difference between us is that Douglas Ross is standing there advocating for himself, as one of the highest—the top 5 per cent—earners in the country, to get £754 extra in a tax cut from his Conservative colleagues. I am advocating that we make sure that we have a real-terms increase for our NHS. That is the difference between us. I believe in an increase for our NHS, an increase to our education budget, an increase for police officers and an increase for the fire service.

What do we get for our progressive taxation system here in Scotland? We get the best-paid NHS staff anywhere in the UK. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Mr Ross!

The First Minister: We get the baby box, we get free prescriptions, we get free nursing and personal care and we get the most generous childcare offer in the UK.

Under the Tories, we get a Brexit that we did not vote for, we get a mini-budget that tanked the economy and we get a Westminster cost of living crisis that is harming millions of households across Scotland.

No wonder the Tories have not won an election in Scotland in almost 70 years. Under the leadership of Douglas Ross, that ain't changing any time soon. *[Applause.]*

The Presiding Officer: Question 2 is from Anas Sarwar—*[Interruption.]* Members, I do not want to be shouting into a void, so I would be grateful if you would carry yourselves with courtesy and respect. Many members wish to ask questions today.

National Health Service (Waiting Lists)

2. Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): I extend my deepest sympathies to the families of those who lost loved ones in the Lockerbie tragedy 35 years ago. My thoughts are with all those in the emergency services and the local community whose bravery and resilience after the event touched us all. Today, we take time to remember everyone who has been affected by the tragedy.

As we break for the Christmas recess, I will take the opportunity to thank all the staff of the Parliament for their hard work throughout the year and to wish the Presiding Officer, all members of the Parliament, all staff and, of course, all the people of Scotland a very merry Christmas.

This year started with Humza Yousaf as health secretary and, throughout the year, things in our NHS have got worse, not better. This year, more than 425,000 patients waited more than four hours at accident and emergency. Almost 55,000 of them were there for more than 12 hours. At the start of the year, 767,938 people were on an NHS waiting list. That now stands at 828,398.

Why is it that everything that the First Minister touches breaks?

The First Minister (Humza Yousaf): Anas Sarwar loses the argument when he goes for the personal attacks, which is what he does regularly and very often. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Members!

The First Minister: I will give Anas Sarwar some of the statistics. In the budget that we have brought forward—which Anas Sarwar and his Labour colleagues have, of course, opposed—we are giving a record investment of more than £19.5 billion to the NHS. That budget is ensuring that we have the best-paid NHS staff anywhere in the United Kingdom. It is a budget that gives a pay uplift to our care workers.

As for NHS waiting lists, of course there are challenges. The global pandemic has impacted health services in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England, and right across the world. However, we are making progress.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): We are not.

The First Minister: I can hear a Labour member shouting, “We are not”, but let me give the statistics. When it comes to the longest waits—those two-year targets—the number of people waiting more than two years for a new out-patient appointment is down 69 per cent. The number of in-patients waiting longer than two years was reduced by 26 per cent.

We will continue to invest in our NHS. Would it not be good if Labour supported a budget that gives record investment to our NHS?

Anas Sarwar: I was quoting Humza Yousaf's record, and let me quote it again:

“You were transport minister and the trains were never on time, when you were justice secretary the police were stretched to breaking point, and now as health minister we've got record high waiting times”.

No, I am not quoting Jackie Baillie—I am sure that even she would struggle to be that harsh—I am quoting Kate Forbes, who sat round the Cabinet table with Humza Yousaf.

On Tuesday, we saw the consequences of Scottish National Party incompetence, waste and failure to grow our economy. Affordable housing funding was cut by £200 million in the middle of a homelessness crisis. Mental health services were cut in real terms in the middle of a mental health crisis, and the fuel insecurity fund was scrapped altogether in the middle of a cost of living crisis. That is the most devastating budget in the history of devolution. Why is it that, on the First Minister's watch, Scots pay more and get less?

The First Minister: On my watch, because of the actions that the Scottish Government has taken, it is estimated that 90,000 children in Scotland will be lifted out of poverty this year. What will not help to tackle child poverty is the two-child limit that Anas Sarwar now supports retaining. What will not help is a bedroom tax that Keir Starmer and Anas Sarwar now support retaining. On my watch, and on this Government's watch, we have more young people from areas of

higher deprivation going to university than ever before.

Yes, there were challenges in the budget—I am not going to pretend otherwise. There are challenges because we have had more than 13 years of Conservative austerity. I will read what the Welsh Labour finance secretary said.

The Presiding Officer: Briefly, First Minister.

The First Minister: She said:

“this is the toughest financial situation Wales has faced since the start of devolution. Our funding settlement, which comes largely from the UK Government, is not enough to reflect the extreme pressures Wales faces.”

Why is it that Labour in Wales has the backbone to challenge Tory austerity, but Anas Sarwar and Scottish Labour do not?

Anas Sarwar: Do not worry: in 2024, we are getting rid of the Tories. What we need to do is get rid of SNP incompetence at the same time. I am surprised that the First Minister did not talk about his so-called progressive tax rise, which is going to raise £82 million. That would buy a fifth of an SNP ferry that has not even sailed yet. He is simply not a serious politician.

The First Minister is so out of touch—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Members!

Anas Sarwar: The First Minister is so out of touch, he thinks that, if someone earns almost £29,000, they should pay more tax in Scotland than in the rest of the UK. Those are not the people with the broadest shoulders, but they are being forced to pay the price for his failures in the middle of a cost of living crisis.

The year 2023 will be remembered as the year when the SNP was found out. It has broken the NHS, the justice system, the housing system, public finances and the public's trust, and it seems to have broken the party in the process. If 2023 was a bad year for the SNP, does Humza Yousaf think that 2024 is going to be any better?

The First Minister: If we are talking about broken, all that Anas Sarwar does is sound like a broken record. Time and time again, he comes here demanding more money for public services, but he opposes every single revenue-raising power and policy that we bring to this Parliament.

Of course, that is the Anas Sarwar of 2023. The Anas Sarwar who was touting for the Labour leadership put out a letter demanding a 50p rate for those who earn £100,000. What happened? *[Interruption.]* I see Anas Sarwar mouthing, “That was before”—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Members!

The First Minister: In fact, the one thing that absolutely will not change in 2024 is that Anas Sarwar will say one thing one day and then another thing another day. We know that Anas Sarwar is not a serious politician. He does not think for himself. He waits until he gets the memo from head office. I do not know whether Anas Sarwar has sent his letter to Santa, but if not—

The Presiding Officer: Briefly, First Minister.

The First Minister: —he should ask for a backbone. If he finds that backbone—

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, First Minister.

The First Minister: —maybe he will stand up for Scotland, as opposed to standing up for Keir Starmer.

Budget (Climate Action)

3. **Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** To ask the First Minister how the budget will support climate action. (S6F-02672)

The First Minister (Humza Yousaf): Tackling the climate emergency is key to my Government's three defining missions, and it lies at the very heart of our draft budget. In our capital resource programmes, we have committed a total of £4.7 billion to climate-positive activities. That includes £2.5 billion of investment in public transport; almost £360 million for warmer, greener homes; a record £220 million for active travel; £158 million for nature and woodland restoration; and more than £60 million to anchor a new offshore wind supply chain.

We have made those choices at the same time as we are being faced with a 10 per cent real-terms cut in our capital budget over the next five years. We have done so not just because investing in climate action is the right thing to do, which of course it is, but because that is where huge economic opportunity for Scotland lies—more jobs, more successful businesses and greater opportunity for the country.

Mark Ruskell: That budget commitment to climate and nature is also a commitment to people. Record funding for active travel creates safer neighbourhoods. Investment in nature means more rural jobs. Funding for warm homes lifts people out of fuel poverty.

Will the First Minister outline how the Government will ensure that the economic benefits of the Government's record investment in climate will reach the very people who need it the most?

The First Minister: We are committed to a just transition to net zero. That just transition is good for our planet, but, fundamentally, it is good for our people, too. The very heart of the just transition is

our people. That transition is already happening. The renewable energy sector has supported more than 42,000 jobs across the Scottish economy, according to the Fraser of Allander Institute's analysis.

We are also taking action to make sure that those who need the most help get the most help. Free bus travel, on which we will spend almost £430 million next year, is cutting emissions while making the lives of more than two million people easier through access to public transport. Our warmer homes Scotland programme has already cut the bills and carbon emissions for 35,000 low-income households, and up to £700 million of funding will be made available to it over the next contract period. We are also investing a record £220 million in making our streets better and safer for cycling and walking, which are the cheapest and the most sustainable forms of transport.

Mark Ruskell is absolutely right. The heart of our climate action has to be people, and that is exactly why we are investing the billions that we are investing in climate-positive actions.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): The Scottish Government is failing to meet climate targets in homes and buildings, transport and land. It still does not have a climate delivery plan or a green industrial strategy, and there are cuts to the energy transition. The just transition fund has been significantly cut, the green jobs fund has gone altogether, and the £67 million announced for offshore supply chain investment is just a reduced and reheated figure from before, at a time when we need major investment in our supply chains to deliver on our green jobs potential. How can the First Minister say that his Government is tackling the climate emergency when it is failing in so many ways?

The First Minister: We have all voted in this Parliament for those world-leading climate change targets, so it is galling that, when we bring proposals forward, they seem to be opposed by the Opposition time and again. When it comes to our climate change plan, we will still publish it within the statutory timelines.

The difficulty for Sarah Boyack is that she demands that we spend more and more money when, all the while, the Conservatives have cut our budget and her leader stood up literally minutes ago opposing any revenue-raising proposals that we bring forward. I am afraid, therefore, that Sarah Boyack has no climate credibility, and she certainly has no economic credibility in that area either.

Creative Scotland (Funding)

4. Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's

response is to reports that Creative Scotland's national lottery extended programme fund has received applications equating to double the available budget, leaving some organisations and charities without funding. (S6F-02675)

The First Minister (Humza Yousaf): The Scottish Government is committed to its continued support for the arts. As announced in the budget this week, we will reinstate £6.6 million to Creative Scotland for its national lottery shortfall funding for 2023-24, along with a further £6.6 million for 2024-25.

All Creative Scotland's funds, whether from Scottish Government grant in aid or United Kingdom national lottery budgets, receive far more eligible applications than can be supported by the available funding. Due to the competitive process for funding, difficult decisions have to be made by Creative Scotland. It is my understanding that, in the event of an unsuccessful application, Creative Scotland will, if an organisation contacts its inquiry service, offer advice on other potential sources of funding that may be available.

Evelyn Tweed: I welcome the significant investment that the budget offers to the culture sector, while Labour in Wales has cut its budget by 10 per cent. As we know, culture organisations across Scotland face substantial rising costs. Will the First Minister say more about how the Scottish budget will support the culture sector, and about what support the Scottish Government offers to organisations such as Creative Stirling in my constituency, which lost out on Creative Scotland funding and faces significant challenges to stay afloat in the year ahead?

The First Minister: First and foremost, I encourage Creative Stirling—an organisation that I know, having been introduced to it by Evelyn Tweed—to make contact with Creative Scotland about other potential avenues of funding. I will ask the appropriate cabinet secretary to be in touch with Evelyn Tweed to see whether we can direct Creative Stirling towards any further support.

As announced in the budget statement earlier this week, we are increasing culture funding by £15.8 million next year. That commitment to additional funding comes despite the significant challenges that our budget faces. I will give that some context. In the Welsh budget on Tuesday, funding for support for culture and the arts was cut by 6.5 per cent, and the United Kingdom Government has cut its funding to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport by 30 per cent in real terms between 2022-23 and the coming year.

We will continue to work with our arts and culture sectors to ensure that we invest in them. However, where we can, we are always happy to provide feedback and assistance to those who

miss out on funding, in order to see how better we can support them.

Loneliness, Isolation and Self-harm

5. Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): To ask the First Minister how the Scottish Government can promote and assist organisations that tackle loneliness, isolation and self-harm over the festive period. (S6F-02673)

The First Minister (Humza Yousaf): As we all know, Christmas can be an exceptionally difficult time. Money worries, loneliness and grief are just a few of the issues that people are confronted with during the festive season, which is why we have launched new content on our mental wellbeing website, Mind to Mind, to support people who may well be struggling at this time of year. That will be supported by a public campaign over the festive period, online and in community settings, including restaurants and supermarkets.

Since 2021, we have invested £51 million in our communities mental health and wellbeing fund for adults, with 3,300 grants being made to local organisations across Scotland to tackle social isolation. That very much complements the action that is under way to fund 53 community organisations that are delivering befriending services and providing opportunities for people to connect.

Social isolation, loneliness, mental health and inequalities have been made worse by the pandemic and, indeed, by the cost of living crisis. The Government continues to respond to those public health issues.

Jamie Greene: For most of us, the Christmas and new year period is a time to look forward to, but many people dread it. Grief, loss, depression, domestic abuse and, indeed, loneliness are the unwelcome gifts that the season too often offers.

Sadly, last year, 762 of our fellow Scots completed suicide. This year, more than 100,000 will be eating their Christmas dinner alone. On that point, I commend the work of Marion Scott at the *Sunday Post* and Age Scotland for their incredible campaigning on the issue of loneliness. I say directly to those watching this who may have feelings of despair this festive season: You are not alone. You can call the Samaritans on 116 123 at any time of the day or night, for free, if you need to talk to someone.

What more support can the Government offer, particularly to charities and volunteers who are always there at the other end of the phone when, far too often, no one else is?

The First Minister: That is a very good question from Jamie Greene. I commend him for often raising such issues at this time of year. As

we all know, anybody, in any demographic, can be impacted by mental health challenges, loneliness or isolation. I add my tributes and thanks to Age Scotland, the *Sunday Post* and others who have done excellent work to highlight the isolation, loneliness and mental health challenges that people face at this time of year.

To answer Jamie Greene's question directly, that is why it is so important that the Government continues to invest in local community organisations that provide support with social isolation. We do that through our social isolation and loneliness fund, which delivers 53 local projects that support people. Seventy per cent of that fund will be distributed to smaller organisations and 30 per cent to larger organisations. That funding supports a range of activities. Many of us will have seen examples of that activity in our constituencies, such as lunch clubs, social group activities, community development, digital connections, creative arts and befriending services. I pay tribute to every organisation, the length and breadth of the country, for the excellent work that they do, especially at this time of year, to tackle loneliness and isolation.

Spiking

6. Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the First Minister whether, and how, the Scottish Government plans to increase awareness of spiking ahead of Christmas and New Year. (S6F-02679)

The First Minister (Humza Yousaf): I thank Pauline McNeill for her important question and recognise that she has regularly raised issues in that regard, particularly around violence against women and girls.

Spiking is an abhorrent act of violence. In the run-up to Christmas, Police Scotland is working with partners to ensure that licensed premises are safe spaces for all, including through introducing a spiking toolkit and by providing advice to licensed premises and relevant partners. We continue to support the best bar none scheme, which delivers bystander intervention training to empower people to address and prevent harassment, and advice on anti-drink-spiking measures.

Police Scotland is also working in partnership with other emergency services, student bodies, universities and colleges and, crucially, our partners in the third sector to raise awareness and provide support for anybody who is affected. We remain absolutely committed to tackling all forms of violence against women, and we encourage anyone who believes that they are a victim to come forward and report it to the police.

Pauline McNeill: Women across the country are being alerted to an increase in spiking. In 2021, worryingly, we started seeing cases of spiking by injection. The most commonly used drugs are gamma hydroxybutyrate—GHB—Rohypnol and ketamine. Spiking constitutes the crime of drugging under the common law in Scotland and can be a statutory crime under the Sexual Offences Act 2003. As the First Minister has identified, it is mainly women who are targeted, but not exclusively. The key characteristics of those drugs are that they are odourless, tasteless and colourless. They can affect the memory, which can make it difficult to report spiking crimes.

As the First Minister has outlined, there are great campaigns relating to those who have been spiked, but I believe that prevention must be central to the strategy. Does the First Minister agree that it is vital to continue to have discussions with the night-time industry, which is already alert to the issue? Spiking is currently not recorded as a category of crime under the Scottish Government's statistics. Does the First Minister think that it should be? Does he agree with Dawn Fyfe of Glasgow-based Wise Women, who asks that women remain vigilant, especially over the Christmas period?

The First Minister: I agree with all of that, and I am more than happy for the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs to look at the issue of how that crime is recorded and to have that conversation with Police Scotland.

At the heart of Pauline McNeill's question, she is absolutely right that prevention is far better than cure. It is so important that we recognise that the disproportionate impact of spiking is, I am afraid, on women. Therefore, I am absolutely committed to the work that we are doing to address violence against women and girls and the preventative work that we are doing with boys and men not just to change their behaviour but to call out unacceptable behaviours.

I am more than happy to ensure that we work closely with Pauline McNeill on these issues, and I agree with her whole-heartedly that we should do more to ensure that there is greater awareness of spiking, particularly at this time of year.

Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): The First Minister says that he takes spiking seriously. His round-table meeting on spiking was due to take place in October—crucially, ahead of this year's festive party season—but, to the dismay of campaigners and victims, it was cancelled. While United Kingdom ministers are taking action to protect victims, complacent Scottish National Party ministers are doing precisely nothing. Can the First Minister tell spiking victims and campaigners when the round table will next meet?

The First Minister: I will not be the only one who is extremely disappointed by the tone of Russell Findlay's question. There should be genuine understanding that, for all our political differences—and I have many political differences with Russell Findlay—he should not suggest that anybody in the chamber does not take spiking seriously. We all take spiking seriously. That is why we have taken a number of actions, worked with a number of partners and supported a number of initiatives in that regard.

We will continue to work with anybody—not just Conservative members—on the issue and with the UK Government on any criminal offence that it looks to introduce. We do not believe that there is necessarily a need to create a separate criminal offence of spiking, because, as Pauline McNeill said, it is already covered through statutory offences. However, I am more than happy for the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs to write to Russell Findlay in detail about the actions that we are taking to tackle spiking in Scotland.

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

Best Start Foods

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): Best start foods provides food support to families with young children under three. It is more generous and has a higher uptake than its equivalent scheme in England. However, the Scottish Government recently reported that some families have unused credits of more than £600 on their account or have not activated their best start foods card.

Does the First Minister agree that, with the scheme opening to an additional 20,000 people in 2024, it is vital that that support is fully used? Will he meet me and the Scottish Pantry Network to discuss a potential pilot project that could see food pantries, including those in my constituency, become strategic partners, to support uptake and ensure that healthy food is accessible and affordable to low-income families?

The First Minister (Humza Yousaf): The Scottish Government would be more than happy to meet Bob Doris and the Scottish Pantry Network, because his points are incredibly important. I am very pleased that we are expanding eligibility for best start foods in February so that a further 20,000 people will benefit. I was pleased to make that announcement earlier this year.

Although estimated take-up for 2022-23 is 92 per cent, some people have not activated or have stopped using their best start foods card. Social Security Scotland is contacting those people to

remind them that the money is theirs and to encourage them to use it.

The card can be used at food pantries. In addition to funding being provided to the Scottish Pantry Network by the Scottish Government, Social Security Scotland works closely with the network, offering drop-in services and appointments to support people to apply for benefits. The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice would be more than interested in hearing about what the network could do to promote best start foods.

Rail Fares

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):

The First Minister's gift to hard-pressed rail passengers was the announcement of a near 9 per cent increase in fares, which is way above the current level of inflation. At a time when we should be doing all that we can to encourage more people to use the train, why is the First Minister doing the opposite?

The First Minister (Humza Yousaf): This is the Government that has abolished and scrapped peak rail fares through our current pilot. This is the Government that froze fares for a number of years.

We again get to the contradiction at the heart of all Conservative contributions, which is that they demand that we spend more money—in this case, on rail services—but oppose every single revenue-raising option. In fact, they go further: they demand tax cuts for the wealthiest in the country. If we had listened to Graham Simpson, Douglas Ross and Liz Smith, we would have £1.5 billion less revenue to spend. Thank goodness we do not listen to the Conservative Party.

New Year's Day (Day Off for Retail Staff)

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): This Parliament passed the Christmas Day and New Year's Day Trading (Scotland) Act 2007, in which provision was made—this was subject, of course, to consultation—for the Scottish ministers to stop large stores trading on new year's day. The First Minister knows, as we all do, that retail staff work very hard, especially at this time of year, when they face longer hours and, indeed, more demanding customers. They deserve a break. The Scottish National Party says that it believes in fair work, yet it has rejected calls from the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers to fully implement the bill. Why is the First Minister opposed to giving staff in large stores the day off on new year's day?

The First Minister (Humza Yousaf): We are not. That is a mischaracterisation of our position. We believe in fair work. We are proud of the work

that our party has done on fair work principles, which we expect everybody—including the Government—to abide by.

I will examine what more we can do in relation to the 2007 act. I am more than happy to work with USDAW, for which we have the utmost respect, and retail staff. It is important that Jackie Baillie raises the point that, at this time of year in particular, our retail staff do an incredible job, often in very difficult circumstances. I will see what more we can do in relation to the 2007 act, because I am proud that we are the party of fair work principles.

Domestic Abuse Support (Festive Season)

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): Although Christmas is a time of peace and joy for many, we know that there is often a spike in cases of domestic abuse over the festive season. What engagement has the Scottish Government had with agencies to ensure that people are supported to report instances of domestic abuse this Christmas?

The First Minister (Humza Yousaf): Rona Mackay is absolutely right to raise the issue. Ensuring that we tackle domestic abuse is a shared endeavour of all of us in Parliament. Domestic abuse is abhorrent, and I want people to know that support is available to them, no matter what time of year it is. I encourage anyone who experiences domestic abuse to report it to the police and to reach out to services for advice and support as soon as they can do so safely.

Agencies and service providers will be raising awareness of the availability of support throughout the festive period. People can also call the Scottish Government-funded domestic abuse helpline on 0800 027 1234.

Lifeline Ferry Service Cover (Scrabster to Stromness)

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): The MV Hamnavoe is due to undergo planned maintenance next month. As a former transport minister, the First Minister will know that, in the past, a Ropax vessel and, more recently, a freight vessel provided cover on the Stromness to Scrabster route over that two-week refit period. This year, there will be no vessel at all on the route. What does the First Minister think that that says about the Government's commitment to lifeline ferry services? Can he offer a guarantee to my constituents that there will be no repeat of that abandonment in years to come?

The First Minister (Humza Yousaf): We take seriously our obligations to our island communities. The budget is undoubtedly a demonstration of that. I am more than happy to

have a discussion with the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Net Zero and Just Transition and the Minister for Transport and for them to write to Liam McArthur about what options there are around the Stromness to Scrabster route, which I know is an incredibly important lifeline route. We will put in place any mitigations that can feasibly be put in place when the Hamnavoe goes for its two-week refit.

Renewable Energy (Jobs)

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): I welcome the significant investment of £66.9 million in the offshore wind supply chain that the Scottish Government announced as part of this week's budget. In the light of the recent Fraser of Allander Institute report on jobs in renewable energy, will the First Minister outline his Government's commitment to growing the green sector in Scotland as part of our journey to net zero?

The First Minister (Humza Yousaf): I warmly welcome the Fraser of Allander Institute's study, which shows that the renewable energy sector supported more than 42,000 jobs across the Scottish economy and generated more than £10.1 billion of output in 2021. The report provides further evidence that Scotland is leading the way in delivering a green jobs revolution and unlocking the huge potential that our energy transition presents.

As I mentioned in response, I think, to Mark Ruskell, it is worth again putting on record the fact that the just transition to net zero is not just a moral imperative—of course, it absolutely is—but a huge economic opportunity for Scotland and one that we are absolutely ready to capitalise on. That is why the budget was so important in providing increased investment to ensure that we have supply chains anchored here in Scotland.

AMTE Power

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): It was reported yesterday that the battery manufacturer AMTE Power has entered administration and that plans for a £190 million mega factory in Dundee that could create 215 jobs on site and 800 more in the supply chain have been scrapped. That is a huge blow to our economy and to our ambitions for a just transition to net zero. What can the First Minister do to provide assurance to current employees? How can we ensure that we get manufacturing facilities for the just transition that we need in the north-east?

The First Minister (Humza Yousaf): I was very concerned to learn recently that AMTE Power has gone into administration. This will be a very difficult time for company staff and their families,

particularly at this time of year. The people who are affected by that decision are our immediate priority. Through our initiative for responding to redundancy situations, partnership action for continuing employment—PACE—the Scottish Government will do everything in its power to help those who have been affected.

I understand that the appointed administrator, FRP Advisory, will continue to look for a positive outcome for the Thurso operation in particular. That region has a track record in innovative battery research, development and manufacturing, spanning 20 years, and every step will be taken to build on the existing capabilities and the associated supply chain.

Point of Order

12:46

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. This week, both the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister have repeatedly said that the United Kingdom Government will cut Scotland's capital budget by 10 per cent over the next five years. However, in evidence to the Finance and Public Administration Committee, the Scottish Fiscal Commission made it clear that there will be a 20 per cent cut to Scotland's budget over the next five years. Will the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister now confirm that the cuts to Scotland's capital budget that have been imposed by the UK Tories will in fact be much deeper than they indicated?

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Mr Gibson, I am sure that, at this point in your parliamentary career, you are aware that that is not a point of order.

We will therefore move on in a moment to the next item of business.

12:47

Meeting suspended.

12:48

On resuming—

Portfolio Question Time

Social Justice

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is portfolio question time and the portfolio today is social justice. Members who wish to ask supplementary questions should press their request-to-speak buttons during the relevant question.

Homelessness-related Deaths

1. **Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to data from National Records of Scotland showing a rise in homelessness-related deaths since 2017. (S6O-02910)

The Minister for Housing (Paul McLennan): It has been encouraging to see a fall in the number of drug-related deaths for a second year, but behind every statistic is a human being and so those numbers drive our commitment to prevent and end homelessness in Scotland. We have established a ministerial oversight group on homelessness in order to bring ministers together to identify actions to prevent and end homelessness, and we are committed to acting on the recommendations of the temporary accommodation task and finish group, which include providing funding for councils and social landlords to bring empty homes back into use and increasing allocations to homeless households.

Colin Smyth: In response to the Government's budget, the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations described the 26 per cent cut in funding for house building as

"an absolute hammer blow for tackling homelessness".

The Chartered Institute of Housing and Shelter both said that it is "devastating", and Homes for Scotland has said that it is "shocking". The Glasgow and West of Scotland Forum of Housing Associations said that the Government's target for house building

"is now dead in the water".

They cannot all be wrong, can they? Will the minister tell us what the impact will be of the utter madness of cutting £200 million from the housing budget? How many more families will be homeless as a result of the cut? How many more lives will be lost because of homelessness?

Paul McLennan: The most important thing is where we find the money from. We heard Mr Gibson's comment about the 20 per cent cut in capital budgets, and I look forward to Mr Smyth

making proposals in any Labour amendment to tackle that issue. We did not want to be in that position in relation to the budget.

As for Mr Smyth's key points about homelessness, the homelessness budgets are being left intact. I have had discussions with the likes of local authorities and the organisations that he mentioned, such as the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations and Homes for Scotland, on maximising the opportunities. We will continue to work with them and other organisations to maximise the opportunities from the £60 million fund that we announced earlier this year and in relation to acquisitions and allocations. I come back to the point that I look forward to seeing in any Labour amendment to the budget how Labour would find additional funding.

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I send my thoughts to the families and friends of people who have died while homeless, which relates to the question. Over the past decade, 2,175 people have been discharged from hospital with no fixed abode registered. I welcome the fact that the figure is coming down from a high of 336 in 2017 to 58 in 2022-23. Will the review of housing policy include a public duty that no one should be discharged from hospital with no fixed abode?

Paul McLennan: As we know, the housing bill will be introduced at the appropriate time. We have talked about the prevention duties, which I cannot go into detail on. One reason why we brought together the ministerial oversight group on homelessness was to look at such issues. Ministers who are responsible for that area are part of that group. We continue to look at the issues, but I cannot go into detail on what will be in the bill.

United Kingdom-Rwanda Migration and Economic Development Partnership

2. Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the potential impact that the United Kingdom-Rwanda migration and economic development partnership may have on its new Scots integration strategy. (S6O-02911)

The Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees (Emma Roddick): We have of course opposed the UK Government's repugnant plans to relocate people to third countries since the memorandum of understanding with Rwanda was announced in April 2022. Legislation that breaks our moral and international obligations further damages the UK's international reputation.

The Scottish ministers continue to challenge the UK Government on the issue, but we are committed to working with our partners at the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the

Scottish Refugee Council on refreshing the new Scots refugee strategy, partly to ensure that it helps to mitigate—where it can—the effects of the UK Government's damaging actions.

Willie Coffey: The Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill, which the Tories are passing at Westminster, is an extremely dangerous piece of legislation. It is needless, dehumanising and legally unsound. What communication has the minister had with her UK Government counterparts to underline how strongly the people of Scotland reject that appalling bill?

Emma Roddick: We have been clear and consistent in our strong opposition to the policy since it was announced, and we will continue to raise with UK ministers significant concerns about this cruel, ineffective and expensive policy and to reiterate our opposition in the light of the bill. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has stated that it does not consider the UK-Rwanda migration and economic development partnership to comply with the UK's international obligations. The UK Government must explain how it will ensure the welfare of extremely vulnerable people in any arrangement to transfer or relocate people who are seeking asylum and must be transparent about how much that is costing.

Poverty (People in Debt to Public Bodies)

3. Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what work to tackle poverty it is currently undertaking to support people who are in debt to public bodies. (S6O-02912)

The Minister for Housing (Paul McLennan): This year, the Scottish Government has allocated almost £3 billion to support policies that tackle poverty and protect people during the on-going cost of living crisis. We have now committed next year to bringing forward a one-off, £1.525 million emergency fund to support councils in helping remove the impact of school meal debt on families. We also protect the most financially vulnerable through the council tax reduction scheme, which supports more than 460,000 households across Scotland with an average saving of £800 per year.

Scottish ministers continue to encourage public bodies to share good practice on debt assistance and collection, promoting empathy and dignity for people struggling with debt.

Carol Mochan: After a lengthy campaign from trade unions and third sector organisations—in particular, I commend Aberlour for its campaign—I welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to providing the funding that will see school meal debt cleared. However, it remains a very short-

term fix. If the Scottish Government is truly committed to reducing the debt owed to public bodies in the future and for the long term, will it increase the thresholds for free school meal eligibility, which Aberlour research suggests have barely risen in 20 years? Increase in eligibility for free school meal provision is a key ask, and a fair one, too.

Paul McLennan: The point that Carol Mochan has made about the free school meal scheme will, I think, be considered in the future.

On the support that is already out there, there is the Scottish child payment, which we heard the First Minister talk about. As for investment in support, one of the key things is to prevent people from getting into debt in the first place. In 2023-24, we invested more than £6.5 million in supporting free debt services in Scotland. That is part of the wider package for income maximisation.

During the week, I visited the Community Help and Advice Initiative in Edinburgh to see its work, which puts a real emphasis on accessible advice. That is a really important point that I would like to emphasise, too, because it is all about going out and meeting people where they are—in schools, in healthcare facilities and in childcare facilities.

Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP): The budget decision to wipe school meals debt will come as a great relief to the families of 30,000 children and demonstrates the targeted interventions that are needed to tackle poverty, despite the limitations of devolution. Will the minister outline how the draft Scottish budget seeks to help low-income families overcome the challenge of escalating bills and debt?

Paul McLennan: Westminster austerity continues to impact our ability to help households. In setting the budget, we adopted a values-based approach that is focused on our three missions, which include tackling poverty. Through that, we are committing £6.3 billion in social security benefits and payments—an increase of more than £1 billion compared with 2023-24—and are funding the £12 per hour real living wage for social care and early learning and childcare workers who deliver funded provision. When we combine the changes to tax and social security, we see that 58 per cent of households are better off under this system than that in the rest of the United Kingdom, given that the majority of those households are in the bottom half of the income distribution.

Carer Support Payment (Western Isles)

4. **Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the roll-out of its new carer support payment in the Western Isles and other pilot areas. (S6O-02913)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice (Shirley-Anne Somerville): Carer support payment, which replaces carers allowance, was successfully launched in pilot areas on 20 November, and I thank colleagues in Dundee City Council, Perth and Kinross Council and the Western Isles Council for making that possible. The benefit is a key milestone in improving support for unpaid carers and will be available to carers in full-time education who cannot currently get carers allowance.

Figures published by Social Security Scotland this week show that we received 160 applications in the first four weeks, with 40 already authorised. The agency will publish official statistics, including a breakdown by local authority, in February.

Alasdair Allan: Will the cabinet secretary say what strategies the Government will employ to maximise take-up of the new benefit in the Western Isles specifically?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Alasdair Allan has raised an important point about benefit take-up. That is exactly why Scotland, unlike the rest of the United Kingdom, has a benefit take-up strategy. I am sure that he is aware of and has already had discussions and meetings with Social Security Scotland's local delivery network—again, a unique service in Scotland—which is there to ensure that agency staff are going out to work with the third sector and with people directly to support them in their applications. That is very important work that we can do locally, alongside the usual marketing campaigns that are on-going in local pilot areas.

Scottish Child Payment (Aberdeen)

5. **Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how many children in Aberdeen have received the Scottish child payment since its inception. (S6O-02914)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice (Shirley-Anne Somerville): Social Security Scotland routinely publishes information on Scottish child payment applications, payments and the number of children actively in receipt of the payment. Although the latest statistics do not currently include information on the total number of children who have benefited from the Scottish child payment, they show that, as of 30 September this year, 10,265 children residing in Aberdeen City were actively benefiting from it.

Kevin Stewart: I welcome the increase to the Scottish child payment that was announced in the budget. The benefit has been described as a “game changer” in the fight to eradicate child poverty. What is the Government doing to ensure that all those who are entitled to the payment in Aberdeen and across Scotland are receiving it?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: In my answer to Dr Allan, I referred to the work of the local delivery staff, which is an important aspect of the delivery of all benefits, including the Scottish child payment, throughout the country. We have, of course, proactively undertaken online and offline marketing campaigns, and those will continue to run in the future at various points. We are keen to ensure that the information about benefits is available in the places where families are already accessing their services, such as schools, general practitioner surgeries, community centres and libraries.

The work that is being done is important, and it is why, although there is still more work to do, the take-up rate for the Scottish child payment is very high.

Employment Injury Assistance (Firefighters Diagnosed with Cancer)

6. Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether its plans for the delivery of employment injury assistance include support for firefighters diagnosed with cancer, in light of reported calls for that welfare benefit to be made available to that workforce. (S6O-02915)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice (Shirley-Anne Somerville): We recognise that there is a range of views on the current industrial injury scheme and the prescribed diseases. It is a hugely complex scheme and a significant investment over time will be required to update eligibility and administration, while also protecting the payments that disabled people rely on.

As I set out to the Social Justice and Social Security Committee last month, we intend to consult on a range of issues relating to the delivery of employment injury assistance shortly.

Jackie Baillie: Last week, the Fire Brigades Union's regional secretary told the *Daily Record* that it wants a statutory expert council to be established so that he and his colleagues can have a seat at the table when the new benefit is designed, independent of the Government. The FBU's DECON research shows that large numbers of firefighters get cancer and that it is, therefore, an industrial disease. Firefighters want to have their voice heard in the design of the benefit, and the cabinet secretary knows that she will have to deliver the benefit very soon. Will she back the FBU's call, back Mark Griffin's bill and give them their seat at the table?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: The Government has made its position on Mark Griffin's bill clear. We do not think that it is sensible to have a discussion about the introduction of a Scottish advisory council without employment injury

assistance being in place—it is but one part of a jigsaw.

I very much hear what the FBU has said on the fact that we need to have the FBU, other unions and stakeholders at the table when we are designing the benefit. That is exactly what we have done with every other benefit that we have implemented in Scotland. I give my guarantee that, regardless of whether the bill goes ahead—that is a matter for Parliament—I will absolutely ensure that they have a seat at the table and that their views are taken account of as we design any benefit.

Personal Independence Payment (Eligibility Criteria)

7. Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the MS Society's reported call for personal independence payment applications to end the so-called 20m rule and replace it with a 50m threshold until an alternative is found. (S6O-02916)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice (Shirley-Anne Somerville): The Government has noted the calls to replace the 20m rule. Adults in Scotland in receipt of PIP are transferring to the adult disability payment, which delivers an improved experience for disabled people in Scotland and considers a person's mobility needs more fairly and consistently.

The independent review of the adult disability payment will examine eligibility criteria, including the 20m rule. The Scottish Government will consider all recommendations arising from that review, including the case for any changes and their deliverability and affordability. The UK Government has not committed to establishing a similar review for the personal independence payment.

Fulton MacGregor: The establishment of the independent review into ADP is welcome as a step to create a disability assistance benefit that fully meets the needs of disabled people. I know that that has been campaigned for by the MS Society, which welcomes the move. Can the cabinet secretary confirm that the scope of the review into ADP will not be limited and that it will be free to make any recommendation that it deems fit and necessary to achieve that aim?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: An important priority for the independent review will be engagement with disabled people and stakeholders, including, I am sure, the MS Society. I encourage full engagement with that review. More detail on how to do that will be provided as the review progresses and following the appointment of a chair. The chair will be independent of

Government and will, of course, make recommendations as they see fit.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): There are high rates of incidence of multiple sclerosis in my constituency. Just walking one footstep over 20m during an assessment on one day can brutally stop someone's eligibility for social security payments. Constituents have told me that, on some days, walking 20m might feel like climbing Everest and, on other days, it might not be so tough. The so-called 20m rule as a measure is not fit for purpose to assess eligibility for PIP or ADP, so why is the Scottish Government still clinging to it, even if that is only temporarily?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: One of the important aspects that we have been clear about is that we have to ensure the safe and secure transition of benefits from the Department for Work and Pensions to Social Security Scotland. That means that major changes are exceptionally difficult to make because we would, in effect, then have a two-tier system with one rule applying for some and one rule applying for others who still remain on PIP before case transfer.

Once safe and secure transition is complete, we will, of course, look to see whether further changes can be made. However, I stress to Beatrice Wishart that we will have to look at the experience of others and how we can improve things, but we will also have to look at the affordability of those items.

Private Rented Housing (Energy Efficiency Standards)

8. Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the housing minister has had with ministerial colleagues regarding any impact on the availability of housing through the private rented sector of its energy efficiency reforms. (S6O-02917)

The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights (Patrick Harvie): Of course the Scottish ministers meet regularly to discuss matters of mutual portfolio interest. There is a long-standing policy to introduce energy efficiency standards in the private rented sector, recognising that tenants have limited powers to make changes themselves. Previous legislation was delayed due to Covid impacts. We now propose to introduce standards as part of a heat in buildings bill, with a target date five years from now and almost a decade since we first consulted on standards. We have commissioned further research on potential impacts on the housing market to ensure that future regulations work for all sectors.

Alexander Stewart: Landlords now face having to renovate their properties to reach a minimum energy efficiency standard by 2028. Letting agencies have warned that the proposals, combined with the Scottish National Party-Green rent cap, could result in landlords having to leave the private rented sector, thus creating a shortage of housing stock. What analysis has the Scottish Government conducted of the impact of its reforms on the private rented sector?

Patrick Harvie: As I said in my first answer, we have commissioned further research. I reinforce the fact that the proposals come as no surprise to anyone in the private rented sector. This has been policy for a long time, and the proposals not only allow an extra five years for compliance but propose an alternative means of meeting the standards by simply working through a standard checklist of applicable measures. That will make the approach flexible, easy, affordable and less disruptive to ensure that the energy efficiency standards are met.

The result will be an approach unlike elsewhere in the United Kingdom, where similar proposals were scrapped by the Prime Minister recently, adding some £300 extra a year on to the energy bills of private rented sector tenants. Mr Stewart might think that that is acceptable, but the Scottish Government does not think that it is. We will save private rented sector tenants money on their energy bills. That should be a natural expectation when people rent their homes.

Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): Does the minister agree that tackling fuel poverty has to be the central aim of the Scottish Government's new deal for tenants in the private rented sector, who are disproportionately in poorly insulated properties? Can he expand on that?

Patrick Harvie: Yes, indeed. The new deal for tenants consultation set out our vision for a rented sector that plays a part in ensuring that everybody has access to a warm, safe, affordable and energy-efficient home. In October, a report on the cost of living showed that some 46 per cent of households in the private rented sector will be in fuel poverty. That is double the rate of owner-occupier households in fuel poverty.

We want the rented sector, whether that is social or private, to provide tenants with good-quality homes that reduce their energy bills but also help to deliver our net zero aims. The regulations on which we are currently consulting will seek to achieve that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions on social justice.

Scottish Land Commission (Appointment of Chair and Commissioners)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is consideration of motion S6M-11733, in the name of Mairi Gougeon, on the appointment of the chair and commissioners of the Scottish Land Commission. I call Mairi Gougeon to speak to and move the motion.

13:10

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): In line with the requirements of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016, the Scottish Land Commission is one of a small number of public bodies for which ministerial appointments to the board are subject to parliamentary approval. Section 10(2) of the 2016 act sets out that

“The Scottish Ministers may appoint a person as a member only if the Scottish Parliament has approved the appointment.”

It does not specify the process that must be followed to obtain parliamentary approval. The parliamentary process to be followed on this occasion was agreed with the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee following an exchange of letters with me. That correspondence was published in full on the committee’s website on 18 December.

The committee agreed that it would take the same approach to consideration of those appointments as it took with the appointments to the board of Environmental Standards Scotland. That approach was to consider the role descriptions and person specifications prior to advertising; to receive information on the proposed candidates from the Scottish Government; to consider and come to a view on whether the process that was followed and the proposed appointments were satisfactory; and to make that view known to Parliament prior to a motion being brought to the chamber. In addition, the convener confirmed in a letter to me on 12 September that the committee had

“agreed not to hear from candidates (either at a formal meeting or informally) as part of the appointment process.”

Appointments to the Scottish Land Commission are regulated by the Ethical Standards Commissioner for Scotland, and the appointments process has been conducted in line with the code of practice for ministerial appointments to public bodies in Scotland. Details of the agreed parliamentary process were subsequently

published in the application information pack for candidates, as is required by the code of practice.

I appointed a selection panel to carry out the appointment process on my behalf, which consisted of the deputy director for land reform, rural and island policy at the Scottish Government; the outgoing chair of the Scottish Land Commission, Andrew Thin; and an independent panel member, Dr Patricia Armstrong.

The Ethical Standards Commissioner decided that the round should be overseen at all stages of the appointments process, meaning that an adviser from his office was also assigned to be a full member of the selection panel. I delegated the creation of the appointment plan, assessment and undertaking of the fit and proper persons test to the selection panel.

The code of practice requires that the selection panel recommend only the most able candidates to the appointing minister. I did not have visibility of the candidates ahead of the selection panel’s recommendations; I received a summary from the panel once the assessment was complete. The posts were publicised widely online and circulated to a wide list of stakeholders. Applications were encouraged from a diverse range of backgrounds, and the Scottish Land Commission ran two information events to enable potential applicants to find out more about the roles.

A total of 17 applications were received for the land commissioner roles, and seven applications were received for the role of chair. I am grateful to the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee members for their engagement throughout the process and for their careful consideration of the appointments. I therefore welcome the committee’s recommendation, in its report to Parliament, that Michael Russell be approved as the next chair of the Scottish Land Commission—*[Interruption.]*—and that Craig Mackenzie and Deborah Roberts be approved as land commissioners—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Members!

Mairi Gougeon: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

In accordance with section 11(4) of the 2016 act, a statement was laid in Parliament on 29 November explaining how Scottish ministers have complied with their statutory duties under subsections 11(1) to 11(3) of the act.

We have a process for these appointments and, more generally, for all ministerial appointments that is robust, fair, transparent and accountable—

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): Corrupt!

Members: Oh!

The Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary, please take your seat for a moment. I am hearing shouting and commenting, and it is simply not going to continue. Members will be well aware of the standing orders of this Parliament, and if they feel unable to adhere to them, perhaps they might reconsider their behaviour as elected representatives.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. The commentary there was entirely unacceptable. Mr Stephen Kerr shouted out the word “corrupt”. I do not know whether you heard that, Presiding Officer. I assume not, but that is entirely unacceptable.

The Presiding Officer: I point out the need for all members to conduct themselves at all times in a courteous and respectful manner.

Mairi Gougeon: For Scottish Land Commission appointments, we also have a parliamentary scrutiny process that is underpinned by statute that was put into effect by the Scottish Government, and rightly so. Ministers appoint and Parliament scrutinises.

I thank everyone who has played their part in the appointment round. I also put on the record my sincere thanks to the outgoing land commissioners, David Adams and Megan MacInnes, and the outgoing chair, Andrew Thin, for their achievements and contributions. With the other commissioners, they have worked really hard to develop an incredibly effective organisation. From getting the commission up and running on time, on 1 April 2017, to establishing it as a respected and authoritative voice on land reform, their marvellous achievements have set the commission on a really firm footing. The leadership of Andrew Thin has been key to all of that, and I pay tribute to his long track record of effective and diligent public service.

The new chair and land commissioners now have the opportunity and the challenge to build on those achievements and continue the work to create a Scotland where everyone can benefit from the ownership and use of the nation’s land and assets. As we enter a further period of land reform, so, too, will the role and work of the commission enter a new phase, and I look forward to working closely with it on that journey. That is why I am pleased to recommend that the Parliament approve the appointments.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee’s 21st Report, 2023 (Session 6), Report on appointments to the Scottish Land Commission (SP Paper 499); welcomes the Committee’s recommendation that the Parliament approves the appointment of Professor Michael Russell, Professor Deborah Roberts and Craig Mackenzie as Land

Commissioners to the Scottish Land Commission; further welcomes the Committee’s endorsement of the selection of Professor Michael Russell as Chair of the Commission, and approves the appointments as required by section 10 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016.

The Presiding Officer: I call Douglas Lumsden to speak to and move amendment S6M-11733.1.

13:16

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): It is regrettable that the committee was unable to come to a unanimous decision on the issue. Perhaps the fact that the vote was split along party lines tells us a lot about the situation that we are in. We should make no mistake—this is a political appointment from an increasingly desperate devolved Government.

Let us look at how the appointment was announced. On 1 December, we heard that Mike Russell had stepped down from his role as president of the SNP. The SNP spin machine swung into action, and, a couple of hours later, an SNP press release told us that he was taking up the role of chair of the Scottish Land Commission, no doubt to quell rumours about why he was leaving. That showed no respect for process and no respect for this Parliament. That is what the SNP had decided and there was no thought at all of respect for the other candidates. It was simply a matter of jobs for the boys. *[Interruption.]*

The job profile calls for someone with integrity and someone who can be an ambassador—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, members.

Douglas Lumsden: —yet Mike Russell has continuously made disparaging comments in the media about people in public life, describing a well-respected female MP as having a tantrum and an MSP as being arrogant. Those are shocking words from someone who is supposed to build relationships. In other comments, Mr Russell has described political opponents as enemies and Conservative MPs as traitors and hard right. This is the person who will be speaking on behalf of the Scottish Land Commission—a person who has used degrading language towards women in public and who has called people who do not agree with his politics enemies—and yet we are supposed to believe that he will now build relationships and engage with stakeholders. What an absolute joke.

This badly judged appointment will not build bridges but will sow division and be bad for our rural sector. The SNP is politicising the commissioner’s role at a time when the Scottish Land Commission will play a vital role in feeding in to the land reform process. It is the equivalent of the SNP marking its own homework, and it should

be resisted. It is a “jobs for the boys” approach, and the fact that the SNP and its Green lapdogs are simply going to vote this through to keep their cabal together as the last gasp before the Christmas recess is simply shocking. The SNP is making bad decisions that will harm the future of our rural sector.

In a week that saw the worst budget for Scottish businesses and for our rural economy, Scotland’s rural community deserves better than this. This Parliament deserves better than this. The appointment simply reeks of nepotism. We all deserve transparency and clarity from the Scottish Government and its ministers. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Members!

Douglas Lumsden: His blatant lack of respect for democratically elected individuals, use of derogatory language and nasty comments about others on social media should have been investigated by the recruitment panel. If that panel is open and transparent, what did its members make of those comments? If they did not take them into account, why not? The committee should be able to question the applicant prior to their appointment so that we can ask those questions in an open and transparent manner.

The sidelining of the Parliament is a disgrace, the leaking to the press is a disgrace, and the proposed appointment is a disgrace. We all deserve better than this.

I move amendment S6M-11733.1, to leave out from “recommendation” to end and insert:

“unanimous recommendation that the Parliament approves the appointment of Professor Deborah Roberts and Craig Mackenzie as Land Commissioners to the Scottish Land Commission; recognises the widespread concerns expressed regarding the recommended appointment of Michael Russell; highlights that Michael Russell’s appointment was not approved unanimously by the Committee because it had not had the opportunity to take evidence from him regarding any potential conflicts of interest that would arise from him having recently been an MSP, president of the Scottish National Party, interim chief executive of the Scottish National Party, and a Scottish Minister; understands that Michael Russell has made a number of inflammatory comments in the past about opposition politicians and parties, as well as about land reform, and therefore questions his ability to be impartial, and approves the appointments of Professor Deborah Roberts and Craig Mackenzie as required by section 10 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016, but, in the interests of protecting the reputation of the Scottish Land Commission, does not approve the appointment of Michael Russell until such time as the Committee has undertaken further scrutiny.”

13:20

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): I will start with a quote from the opening paragraph of the Scottish Government’s webpage on the Open Government Partnership.

“As members of the Open Government Partnership, we’re working alongside governments from all over the world to open up government by committing to the values of openness, transparency, accountability and citizen participation.”

Juliet Swann from Transparency International UK has said that

“a lack of complete transparency leads to rumour, hearsay and conjecture which all undermine the principle of openness which was so celebrated”

by the Scottish Parliament when it was first founded.

I will go back to a motion that was passed by the chamber on 3 May 2023. It said:

“That the Parliament agrees that good governance and transparency are matters of the utmost importance”.

I again reflect on the Nolan principles of objectivity, accountability and openness. Those principles say that “Holders of public office” must “act and take decisions” impartially and fairly, and be held to account. Those decisions should be taken

“in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear, lawful reasons for so doing.”

In 1997, the chosen founding principles of the Scottish Parliament were accountability, being open and encouraging participation, power sharing and equality of opportunity.

We have heard from the minister about the Scottish Government’s commitment to parliamentary scrutiny. The situation that is before us is as follows. On 18 December, two of the land commissioner posts became vacant. The chair vacancy does not arise until 18 March next year. Douglas Lumsden’s amendment would allow the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee the opportunity to review the decision—not about all three nominees but about one nominee who will not take their seat until next year. It may well be—I strongly disagree with the previous speech—that the person who has been appointed is the best person to hold the post.

I agree with the cabinet secretary that there is evidence that the committee said that it was going to follow the procedure that had been adopted in the past before it knew the names of any nominees. During the current and previous parliamentary sessions, members and the Scottish Government have spoken about the importance of honouring scrutiny. That allows a person to take up a role knowing that their appointment has been fully scrutinised, so that the people of Scotland can have absolute confidence that that person is the right person for the job. That is recognised in the founding principles of the Parliament. The Scottish Government has an opportunity to take what I agree is a difficult decision. However, that

decision will not hinder the work of the commission, because two of the commissioners have been supported and could take up the vacant post.

I do not speak on behalf of the committee, nor do I intend to. I am sure, however, that the chair can have a public hearing before the date that they take up the post in order to reassure themselves that—just as the minister is confident that the information that she was given during the recruitment process is accurate—they can be confident that the principles have been applied accurately and that the right person is being appointed for the job. Irrespective of the individuals concerned, we have an opportunity to say to the people of Scotland, “We are transparent. We stand by that. Even when it is a challenge, we support it.”

13:24

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): I am relatively new to the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, so my role was to content myself that the process, which previous members of the committee had agreed with the Scottish Government, had been fulfilled and that fidelity to the process had been observed. That was underpinned by the office of the Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland. That was my duty as a new member of the committee. When we looked at the available information, it was clear that that was the case.

I will not include Mr Whitfield in the observations that I am about to make. We have to look at the motivation for objecting to the appointment. We have heard Mr Kerr’s scurrilous accusations from a sedentary position—shame on him—and Mr Lumsden has said in public what his motivations are. Is it to re-run an interview process that was independent of Government and overseen by the office of the Commissioner of Ethical Standards? Is it to make up unsubstantiated inflammatory and spurious party-political points at a committee? I suspect so. Is it to honour the fidelity to the process that our committee signed up to? Absolutely not.

I look forward to the new chair, when they take their place, attending our committee early. I fully expect robust exchanges, which is absolutely as it should be.

My role is simple. I need to assure myself that the process, which the committee said would be robust, open, certain, independent and scrutinised—not just by our committee but by the Commissioner for Ethical Standards—has been adhered to. It has been.

On that basis, and only on that basis, I support all the appointments that are being made this afternoon.

13:26

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): First, I thank Kevin Stewart for making his point of order and putting in the *Official Report* the comment that I made from a sedentary position, which was that, to people who are observing the proceedings of Parliament, the process shows every sign of being something that could easily be perceived as being a corrupt abuse of power.

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): Is Mr Kerr being mindful of the fact that the process for the public appointment that we are considering today is the same as the process for every other public appointment? If that is the case, is Mr Kerr—it would be unwise, in my view—questioning the Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland?

Stephen Kerr: I am questioning the suitability of the former president of the SNP and the former interim chief executive officer of the SNP as an appropriate person to hold such a critical and sensitive role. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Members!

Stephen Kerr: On top of that, there is the stench of cronyism and deep cynicism from the SNP putting forward that name at this moment—in the very last moments of the very last sitting day before the Christmas recess.

Mike Russell has engaged in personal abuse as the stock in trade of his style of politics. He has gone beyond the boundary of robust political debate. He has described those who disagree with him as being—

Kevin Stewart: Mr Kerr has just said that Mr Russell has gone “beyond ... robust political debate”—a situation of a pot calling a kettle black. Presiding Officer, it is up to you to decide, but I would say that what Mr Kerr has said today has gone way “beyond ... robust political debate”.

Stephen Kerr: I am not sure whether that was an intervention or a point of order.

The Presiding Officer: I reassure Mr Stewart that I will intervene as and when I think that it is appropriate.

Stephen Kerr: I believe in robust political exchanges and debate, and I would never deny that. However, when it comes to personally attacking or abusing political opponents—*[Interruption.]*—when describing those—*[Interruption.]* When there is a robust debate and exchange of ideas, we are not attacking the

person; we are attacking the ideas. To engage in political debate—

The Presiding Officer: Mr Kerr, conclude your remarks. Thank you.

Stephen Kerr: It is wholly unacceptable for someone who has used political debate for personal abuse and to attack people on a personal basis, and who has described those who disagree with his ideas as “enemies”—enemies of Scotland—to sit in this role, and it is deeply—

The Presiding Officer: You must conclude.

Stephen Kerr: It is deeply cynical of the Government to even suggest that, and Scotland can see it.

The Presiding Officer: You must conclude, Mr Kerr.

Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I seek your guidance on whether Mr Kerr has crossed the line between criticising an individual and casting doubt on the efficacy and propriety of the processes of this Parliament.

The Presiding Officer: I thank Mr Allan for his contribution. As I have said, I will intervene as and when I think that it is necessary.

We move to winding-up speeches.

13:31

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): Given Mike Russell’s legendary reputation for modesty and self-effacement, I, like others in the chamber, will be astonished that he has managed to overcome that and consented to be nominated. How he must have agonised as he resigned from those many prestigious, if empty, political honorariums that, only days before, he had so coveted. One can only speculate about what it was about this well-remunerated role that first appealed to him.

We know that this master of self-awareness will have realised the problem already. We know that Mike Russell will do anything for independence, even ride around in a horse-box for a summer tour. However, can he truly be independent? The evidence is clear that he cannot.

Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP): Just so that we are clear about the acme of good practice in making appointments, what does the member think of the appointment of people such as Michelle Mone to the House of Lords?

Rachael Hamilton: The appointment that we are discussing right now is of Mike Russell, the previous chairman of the SNP.

Mike Russell has called his political opponents “enemies” and “anti-Scottish”. This is a man who, last month, blamed the Scottish Conservatives for the scandal over Michael Matheson’s £11,000 iPad bill for streaming Celtic games in Morocco. His judgment is skewed, he is biased beyond repair and he is clearly unfit for such an important role.

Although the SNP Government has delayed it, we are about to embark on important legislation regarding land reform. That process was supported by the formation of the SLC in 2017, chaired by Andrew Thin. For five years, he and the SLC have stimulated debate based on issues, not politics. Mike Russell’s uncompromising and entrenched political views and divisive approach will undermine that important work. There is a fear not only that politics, not the issues, will dominate land reform but that many organisations that know Mike Russell and his views will cease to engage. Therefore, this job for the boys will compromise land reform, not facilitate it.

Why has the man who is infamous for his dyed-in-the-wool nationalism suddenly decided that he wants to move away from party politics? Earlier this year, the former SNP president said:

“In my 50-year association with the party, this is the biggest and most challenging crisis we’ve ever faced, certainly while we’ve been in government.”

When the going gets tough, Mike gets going.

In the same interview—

The Presiding Officer: Please conclude, Ms Hamilton.

Rachael Hamilton: In the same interview, he said:

“My main focus is how we can create a new Yes movement that allows for different visions but conducted in an atmosphere of mutual trust.”

That should disqualify him from this post. He has made it abundantly clear that his main focus is on creating a new yes movement. The SLC does not need a yes man; it needs someone credible who can make their own decisions, not toe the party line and act on the SNP’s behalf at every turn. Mike Russell will do the SNP’s bidding. He will not act in Scotland’s best interests. I urge members to vote against this appointment.

13:34

Mairi Gougeon: I was going to say that I am really disappointed by the turn that the debate has taken today, but I am not just disappointed—I am disgusted by some of the comments that I have heard about the process in the chamber this afternoon. The only things that have been a disgrace today are Douglas Lumsden’s

politicisation of the process and Stephen Kerr's disgraceful comments.

Land reform is a key priority for the Government and our co-operation partners. From the contributions across the chamber, I know that the issue is important to the Parliament. The Scottish Land Commission is clearly important to the delivery of land reform measures that have already been enacted and to supporting further reform through advice and research.

These appointments are therefore significant, so it is important that we get this right, and we have done that. The ministerial appointments process has been adhered to fully.

In addition, I want to reiterate a few points. The parliamentary scrutiny process was agreed with the lead committee via correspondence in advance of the appointments being advertised. The details of the role that the committee would play were subsequently published in the applicant information pack for candidates, as required by the "Code of Practice for Ministerial Appointments to Public Bodies in Scotland".

In addition to complying with the statutory requirements and the lead committee's handling preferences, the appointments were fully regulated by the Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland, and the commissioner's adviser was a full member of the selection panel that I appointed to oversee the process.

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

Mairi Gougeon: Not at the moment.

Mr Lumsden's amendment to the motion implies that the committee, of which he is a member, was not given the opportunity to scrutinise the appointments. That is patently not the case. It was offered that opportunity in September, but it chose not to do so. *[Interruption.]*

In fact, in a letter from the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee to me, dated 12 September, the convener stated:

"For clarity the Committee has agreed not to hear from candidates (either at a formal meeting or informally) as part of the appointment process."

It feels really disingenuous and inappropriate for some members of the committee to now change their minds—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear the cabinet secretary.

Mairi Gougeon: I will repeat that last bit, because it is really important. It feels really disingenuous and inappropriate for some members of the committee to change their minds

now that they know who the successful candidate is. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, members.

Mairi Gougeon: Indeed, I would contend that to allow such an approach would discredit and threaten the whole viability—

Monica Lennon: On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer: I am sorry, cabinet secretary. Monica Lennon has a point of order.

Monica Lennon: I regret that the cabinet secretary did not take my intervention, but what she has said is not appropriate. Yes, we put out that letter in September, but information—*[Interruption.]*—about the process was leaked to the media, and that should not be lost. Can I ask your advice, Presiding Officer—

The Presiding Officer: Ms Lennon, I confirm that points of order refer to whether the correct procedure relating to the current item of business has been, or is being, followed.

Monica Lennon: The cabinet secretary has accused the committee of being disingenuous. Part of our scrutiny involved reacting to information about this confidential process being leaked to the media.

The Presiding Officer: Ms Lennon, I will again say that that is not a point of order. I ask the cabinet secretary to resume.

Mairi Gougeon: Thank you. To clarify, I did not accuse the committee of being disingenuous and inappropriate—

Monica Lennon: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Mairi Gougeon: I believe that the member has made her point. I said that, for some members of the committee to change their minds once they know who—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Members!

Mairi Gougeon: I want to focus on the independent nature of that process. Following my appointment of the selection panel, I delegated the creation of the appointment plan, the assessment and the undertaking of the fit and proper person test to the selection panel. That is entirely in keeping with usual processes for public appointments. I had no sight of that process until the panel sent me a summary once it had made its assessments, as happens in all other ministerial appointment processes. For the chair role only, agreement was also required by the First Minister. That is the standard process for the appointment of chairs to public bodies, in accordance with the ministerial code.

I want to assure the Parliament that the process has been conducted in full adherence with the requirements of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016 and the preferred handling by the lead committee, and that the process was fully regulated by the ethical standards commissioner.

The Presiding Officer: You should conclude, please.

Mairi Gougeon: I am drawing my comments to a close, Presiding Officer.

That is why I am confident that the nominated chair and the two nominated land commissioners will join the Scottish Land Commission, will contribute their talents, knowledge and expertise, and—as all other commissioners do—will make their contribution to the work of the commission with integrity, passion, impartiality, transparency and enthusiasm. I look forward to working with them in the coming months and years in order to make further vital progress on our land reform journey.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on the appointment of the chair and commissioners of the Scottish Land Commission.

Decision Time

13:40

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): There are two questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S6M-11733.1, in the name of Douglas Lumsden, which seeks to amend motion S6M-11733, in the name of Mairi Gougeon, on the appointment of the chair and commissioners of the Scottish Land Commission, 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.

13:40

Meeting suspended.

13:43

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We move to the division on amendment S6M-11733.1, in the name of Douglas Lumsden. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I voted no, but I am unclear whether that was registered.

The Presiding Officer: I can confirm that your vote has been recorded, Mr Allan.

For

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

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

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 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)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (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)
 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)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

Abstentions

Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-11733.1, in the name of Douglas Lumsden, is: For 52, Against 64, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S6M-11733, in the name of Mairi Gougeon, on the appointment of the chair and commissioners of the Scottish Land Commission, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Alasdair Allan: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I had wi-fi problems. I would have voted yes.

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

Siobhian Brown (Ayr) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would have voted yes, too.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Brown. We will ensure that that is recorded.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)

Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (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)
 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)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)

Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 64, Against 54, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament notes the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee's 21st Report, 2023 (Session 6), Report on appointments to the Scottish Land Commission (SP Paper 499); welcomes the Committee's recommendation that the Parliament approves the appointment of Professor Michael Russell, Professor Deborah Roberts and Craig Mackenzie as Land Commissioners to the Scottish Land Commission; further welcomes the Committee's endorsement of the selection of Professor Michael Russell as Chair of the Commission, and approves the appointments as required by section 10 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016.

The Presiding Officer: I take this opportunity, before members' business, to wish all members and, of course, all Parliament staff a very merry Christmas and a happy new year. [*Applause.*]

Marie Curie (75th Anniversary)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): We are in the home straight.

The final item of business is a members' business debate on S6M-09975, in the name of Bob Doris, on 75 years of Marie Curie. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament congratulates Marie Curie on its 75th anniversary; recognises that, since its inception in 1948, Marie Curie has provided palliative and end of life care and support to millions of people affected by terminal illness and those dealing with dying, death, and bereavement across the UK; understands that Marie Curie works closely with NHS Scotland and is the largest provider of palliative care services for adults outside the NHS; believes that access to appropriate palliative care services is a key element of ensuring the best possible end of life experience; welcomes what it sees as the invaluable contribution of the Marie Curie nursing and volunteer services and its two hospices in Edinburgh and Glasgow; commends its most recent report, *How Many People Need Palliative Care?*, which was published on 6 July 2023 and maps palliative care need across the UK into the late 2040s; understands that, according to the report, palliative care need will increase by more than 25 per cent across the UK by 2048; notes its prediction that the number of 85 year olds living in Scotland will increase by 90 per cent by 2048 to 257,000; considers that, while welcome, this presents a challenge to palliative care services as the number of people with comorbidities in need of complex person-centred care and pain management at the end of life will also increase; understands that Marie Curie is the largest charitable funder of palliative and end of life research; commends the work of all at Marie Curie, including its clinical staff, support services and volunteer helper services, who work to ensure that everyone has the best possible end of life experience, and looks forward to further developing Scotland's public policy and delivery framework to most effectively meet that goal.

13:49

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): It is a privilege to lead the final debate in 2023 of Scotland's Parliament to congratulate Marie Curie on celebrating its 75th anniversary this year.

That we have such a parliamentary debate just before Christmas is fitting. As many of us head off for our Christmas break, the work of Marie Curie staff will continue undiminished. They will provide dignified, respectful, caring and compassionate palliative and end-of-life care in a hospice setting and in people's homes over the entire holiday period. That will not stop. Marie Curie staff and its army of volunteers and fundraisers deserve our heartfelt thanks and support for all that they do, not just over the festive period but all year round. I will say more on that later.

Our thanks to Marie Curie must reach back some 75 years since its inception in 1948. Across

the UK, Marie Curie has provided palliative and end-of-life care and support to millions of people affected by terminal illness and those dealing with dying, death and, importantly, bereavement. Marie Curie serves the communities that I represent with hospice-at-home services across Maryhill and Springburn and beyond, as well as at its inspirational hospice at Stobhill.

I use that word "inspirational" quite deliberately, and I extend the description to the wider hospice movement, including St Margaret of Scotland hospice in Clydebank, which showed great love to my father in the last weeks of his life. Marie Curie is inspirational and unflinching in the love, care, compassion and support that it offers people approaching the end of life, as well as their families.

Marie Curie has come a long way since its first home was opened in 1952 at the Hill of Tarvit in Cupar in Fife. Initially, it provided residential care to cancer patients and ran a home nursing service, with clinical advice provided primarily by general practitioners.

Marie Curie's willingness to innovate, change and adapt has been crucial over the years, which is another theme that I will return to. It saw significant change in the 1980s, moving away from providing long-term nursing care to cancer patients and becoming increasingly focused on palliative and end-of-life care in communities and hospices. It was caring for more patients, who were more seriously ill, for shorter periods of time. Medical care was and is led by consultants in palliative medicine, and specialised services are provided by allied health professionals. Marie Curie hospices also developed a wide range of day services, reaching out into their communities.

The 2000s witnessed further change and innovation. Marie Curie committed to providing palliative and end-of-life care to all people diagnosed with a terminal illness, irrespective of their diagnosis, and, in 2014, to reflect that, it removed "Cancer Care" from its name.

Marie Curie has two hospices in Scotland: the one in my constituency and another in Edinburgh. However, it is a truly national service and, one way or another, offers hospice-at-home services across 31 of Scotland's 32 local authorities.

Its report from July entitled "How many people need palliative care?" demonstrates why we need Marie Curie and others more than ever. We need their expertise, dedication and innovation. Palliative care needs are set to increase by more than 25 per cent by 2048, and modelling work suggests that the number of 85-year-olds living in Scotland will increase by 90 per cent to 257,000 by 2048. We should celebrate and welcome that scenario, but we must also address the clear

service and funding challenges that will be presented to government at all levels, as well as to the wider public sector and all delivery partners that support palliative and end-of-life care.

The growing challenge of supporting all those with multimorbidities who will be in need of complex person-centred care and pain management at the end of life is daunting, but it should also be cherished. Offering love and ensuring dignity and quality of life to all in such situations is the core business of a humane, caring and compassionate society.

I said earlier that I would return to the issue of the support required. I welcome the Scottish Government's recently announced strategy steering group to oversee the development and delivery of a new palliative and end-of-life care strategy and associated work programmes. We can all agree with the principles that will underpin the new strategy, including equitable access to general and specialist palliative care services and the development of a fair, transparent and ethical commissioning and funding process. Marie Curie and Scotland's network of hospices and hospice-at-home services will be key partners in delivering on those ambitions, and they will also be key partners in developing the innovative new models of palliative and end-of-life care that will be required, as Marie Curie has always done since its inception in 1948.

I want to offer some suggestions to support that innovation. The debate on pay pressures and funding gaps in the hospice sector has been well rehearsed in the Scottish Parliament in recent months. The £16 million gap that has been identified has been driven, in large part, by the hospice sector trying to keep pace with the very welcome and significant pay awards that the Scottish Government has made to national health service workers.

Any new sustainable funding model for hospices must have an in-built mechanism by which NHS pay awards in Scotland recognise the clear and obvious knock-on effects on pay pressures in the hospice sector. That should form part of any ethical commissioning and funding process that is developed.

I note that some of the communities that I serve have significant levels of deprivation. Areas of deprivation are more likely to have a higher proportion of people living with multimorbidities, and doing so at an earlier age; have lower levels of healthy life expectancy; have less financial resource; and, often, have more precarious support networks. That must be taken into account when we map out how to deliver the equitable access to general and specialist palliative services that we are all committed to.

Perhaps we need to start being explicit in legislation about a right to palliative and end-of-life care, as that might focus minds and drive the budget decisions of the people who are tasked with designing future provision across Scotland. I ask the minister to consider what opportunities are presented in the proposed human rights bill and the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill, which will progress through this Parliament, to do just that, and I ask her to work with me, Marie Curie and others to achieve that end.

I conclude by congratulating Marie Curie on its 75th anniversary, and I end as I began, by passing on my heartfelt thanks to all those who offer such wonderful palliative and end-of-life care. Of course, I also wish everyone a merry Christmas and very happy new year. *[Applause.]*

13:57

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): It does not seem that long since I hosted the round-table session on the dying in the margins study by Marie Curie and the University of Glasgow. That was back in November, and there was a members' business debate on that study in the chamber. A few weeks after that, I led a members' business debate entitled "Charitable Hospice Care to Meet Future Need".

I see many familiar faces in the chamber. I thank Bob Doris for bringing the subject of hospices back to the chamber at what is perhaps a more poignant time of the year, when it means more to most, and I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak on the subject again.

Marie Curie has done excellent work over the past 75 years, and it continues to provide vital services to those who need palliative and end-of-life care. It supports millions of people who are affected by terminal illness and those who are dealing with dying, death and—importantly—bereavement across the UK.

Marie Curie is the largest charitable funder of palliative care research in the UK and the largest third sector provider of palliative and end-of-life services for adults in Scotland. As Bob Doris has said, there are two Marie Curie hospices in Scotland—in Edinburgh and Glasgow. In 2022-23, Marie Curie supported more than 8,100 people in Scotland; in the same year, around 8,815 people died in the Lothian region, 90 per cent of whom had a palliative care need. Hospices are critical in meeting that need. Indeed, across the region, Marie Curie hospice care-at-home teams made 4,060 visits to 672 terminally ill people.

In November, I visited the Marie Curie hospice in Fairmilehead. When I entered it, I was immediately enveloped by a calmness and serenity that gave me a sense of wellbeing and

care. I was given a tour of the facilities and had the chance to speak to members of staff. Early Marie Curie homes were housed in converted buildings that were not ideal for the type of care that they delivered; the hospice at Fairmilehead, which was opened in 1966, was the second purpose-built building that was designed and built by Marie Curie in the UK. It was designed to care for those who were seriously ill with advanced conditions. In the past year, the Marie Curie hospice service in Edinburgh and West Lothian has supported a total of 1,690 patients with in-patient, out-patient and, importantly, community and day therapy services.

I think that many people have preconceived ideas about hospice care. Most of Marie Curie's work is done in the community, with the majority of hospice care being delivered beyond hospice buildings and walls and out in people's homes. That gives people the option to die with their friends and family, at home and supported by teams of experts. Marie Curie has a fast-track team that helps people with tasks such as washing, caring and showering as they get close to the end of life. Crucially, it keeps them out of a hospital setting; the team is essential to keeping people in the right place and offers family support to relatives.

It was disappointing that this week's budget made no mention of the support needed by hospices to address the £16 million deficit that the sector faces. The rapidly growing need for palliative care in Scotland means that the vital contribution made by hospices will become increasingly important, and I hope that the issue will be considered in future.

In closing, I echo what Bob Doris said about Marie Curie's inspirational work across the country, about how supportive it is to families and those at the end of life and about how innovative it continues to be. I thank Marie Curie for 75 years of care and wish the charity well in the future.

14:01

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I thank Bob Doris for securing the final members' business debate of the year. I reiterate my thanks to Marie Curie as it celebrates 75 years of palliative care, research and end-of-life services across the UK.

The work that Marie Curie has done, and continues to do, to support millions of people affected by terminal illness, death and bereavement is absolutely invaluable to our communities and our healthcare system. However, if Marie Curie is to have another 75 years of success, urgent Government support is required.

As Bob Doris said, we know that demand for palliative care is set to increase over the next 25

years and that, by 2040, two thirds of all deaths in Scotland will be in care homes and hospices. The unmet need for palliative care remains significant, with one in four people unable to access support at the end of life. As costs have increased, there has been an inevitable decrease in the amount of activity that Marie Curie and other charitable hospices can offer.

As a result of rising inflation and the pay uplift for NHS nurses, palliative care providers have been left with a £16 million deficit. They have had to increase their nurses' pay to stay in line with the NHS and avoid losing staff. That is entirely linked to action taken by the Scottish Government, yet there was no offer of any remedial funding in Tuesday's budget. I hope that the minister will reflect on that.

Bob Doris: I thank Jackie Baillie for giving way, partly because that allows me to place on record my thanks to colleagues for signing the motion that allowed this debate to go ahead.

Does Jackie Baillie agree that money is in very short supply and that we need a sustainable future funding model that takes all that into account? Does she agree that we need not a short-term solution but a long-term strategy?

Jackie Baillie: On this occasion, I am happy to agree absolutely with Bob Doris. There is a need for something now to help hospices over this hurdle but, as Mr Doris entirely correctly suggested, there is a need to build that in.

Marie Curie and other hospices need more than warm words of congratulation; they need the sustainable long-term funding that Bob Doris and I agree on. The service simply cannot be expected to provide care as demand rises in the coming years when current funding arrangements cover less than 40 per cent of their costs. We all agree that palliative care services are important, as are the people who work in hospices and palliative care. That work is two-thirds funded by donations from the people, companies and trusts that decide to support the sector.

I agree with Bob Doris again in paying tribute to St Margaret of Scotland hospice, which helps people in my constituency, and I also pay tribute to Children's Hospices Across Scotland, which provides care for children with life-limiting illnesses.

If the Government truly values Marie Curie and other hospices in Scotland, it needs to support them properly and should ensure a minimum of 50 per cent statutory funding for providers. It should also assess the impact of future NHS pay awards on the hospice sector, to ensure that funding is provided to allow hospices to match NHS pay awards for their staff. Failure to do so will widen the gap between those who can and those who

cannot gain access to palliative care, which will put extra strain on the NHS and cost the taxpayer millions of pounds.

Just as every person should be born with the very best start in life and receive healthcare throughout their life as and when they need it, so each and every one of us should have a right to die with dignity and care. The Scottish Government has a duty to prioritise palliative care staff and services in line with the work that is done in the NHS and social care. The Government must do more to support hospices such as the Marie Curie ones. The organisation has done so much for the people of Scotland for the past 75 years and, for that work, Marie Curie has our heartfelt gratitude.

14:06

Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP): I join my colleagues in congratulating Marie Curie on its 75th anniversary. I am grateful to Bob Doris for raising that important milestone in a members' business debate.

Death is a part of life, and it is important that the fairness, equality and dignity that we aim to provide in life are extended to those who are approaching death. Marie Curie's work over the past 75 years has made that a reality for many.

In its capacity at the front line, Marie Curie has offered crucial insight into the needs and challenges of those it cares for. I support its calls for more research to better understand the rise in demand that we face. Scotland's population is ageing and the proportion is higher in rural and island communities, so a disproportionately large amount of future palliative care is likely to be required in those areas. However, research that was published in *The BMJ* found that terminally ill patients who live in rural and remote areas are at significant risk of being hidden and forgotten. I would like to see further research into the challenges that they face.

Marie Curie highlights the four As—availability, accessibility, accommodation and affordability. Availability of resources—from specialist teams and social care workers to equipment and technology—is more limited. Accessibility challenges abound because of the lack of public transport, the poor road conditions, the need for accessible vehicles and the long distances. Accommodating the needs of terminally ill people can be more difficult because of a lack of accessible housing. On affordability, being terminally ill costs an individual between £12,000 and £16,000 a year on average. That is compounded by the rural premium, which puts terminally ill people in rural communities at much greater risk of poverty.

Applying to rural settings policy that is designed in and for urban areas does not work. Research is much needed to better understand how we can overcome those challenges. Thank you to Marie Curie for all the research that it has done over the years, which has been of extremely high quality.

I was pleased to sponsor the exhibition about the dying in the margins project and photographs from Marie Curie and the University of Glasgow. I am sure that members will all agree that that was a powerful piece of work. The loved ones of the participants who came to Parliament were generous with their time. They spoke to me about their loved ones participating in the exhibition and said that that was a legacy.

It is up to us to ensure that the legacy is one of change and improvement. I call on the Government to support more such research, to ensure that no one is forgotten or left behind and to ensure that demand is met. Finally, I wish you all a very merry Christmas.

14:09

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I want to start by paying tribute to and thanking Bob Doris for bringing this debate—the final debate before recess—to Parliament and for his work chairing the cross-party group on palliative care. It is important to recognise the cross-party working that takes place in the Parliament on this issue.

As we look forward to Christmas, which is just round the corner, it is quite telling that many families will be using the services that our hospice sector provides. Marie Curie will be at the heart of that, especially for many of my constituents in Lothian. I put on record our thanks to Marie Curie at what will be a difficult time but what must also be a really good time for people who are celebrating Christmas—some know that it might be their last Christmas. The work that hospices will be doing to make sure that many wishes come true for people this Christmas is incredibly important.

Across Scotland, what our hospice sector does day in, day out, 24 hours a day, must be recognised and understood. I put on record my thanks to Marie Curie and our whole hospice sector for what they do.

However, as has been outlined—I associate myself with what other members have said—we know that there is huge unmet need for palliative care in Scotland. Despite Marie Curie and our hospices trying to meet that need and fill that gap, there is unmet need, because around one in four people do not have access to the palliative care and support that they need at the end of their life. As we have heard and as Bob Doris outlined, poverty is often a barrier to accessing palliative

care, which is one of the key challenges that we must address.

I was taken by a point in Marie Curie's briefing for the debate. It compared a finding from the "Report on a National Survey Concerning Patients with Cancer Nursed at Home" from 1952 with a 2022 survey and found many overlapping problems that we have not resolved. That should result in a real demand that we all step up to address this issue, because we know that the need for palliative care is increasing and that an ageing population will present more challenges for our health service. Our hospice sector will be there, wanting to help to fill that gap. We as parliamentarians, and the Government especially, need to be there to help.

The funding problems that the sector faces today and will face in future are at the heart of what the Government must look at. We see a cross-party consensus on what needs to be a better deal for our hospice sector. Many people will have views on how that is shaped, and I know that the Government has views on it. However, it is an emergency situation for some hospices that are using their own reserves now, and that needs to change. I hope that, in the new year, the Government will look towards a solution.

I hope that the new year will present opportunities for the palliative care sector. We have the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill. I hope that, unlike what we did as a Parliament on the integration of health and social care, we will make sure that the hospice sector is at the heart of what that bill delivers. That is why I hope that the Government will also look towards enshrining a right to palliative care in the bill. We need to solve the problems that prevent us from addressing the issues. A person should be able to have a prompt assessment, and some people want specific services to be developed. Positive conversations around death can then take place with family and friends, with the individual at the heart of the decisions.

I hope that, from this and previous debates, the Government will take away the fact that there is real cross-party belief in the need to look at what palliative care means in Scotland for the future and understand that that is an ask of Government. There is an opportunity for Parliament to unite to do something that sustains and takes forward our palliative sector next year.

As others have done, I pay tribute to Marie Curie for what it has achieved over the past 75 years. It is a remarkable milestone anniversary, but I know that it is not resting on any laurels. It wants to make sure that it is there for every family and individual.

Deputy Presiding Officer, I take this opportunity to wish you, everyone else in the chamber and those watching a very merry Christmas.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Briggs.

14:14

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): I, too, thank Bob Doris for bringing the motion to Parliament for debate and Marie Curie for its 75 years of providing palliative care across Scotland and the UK.

The first Marie Curie home in the UK was opened in 1952 at the Hill of Tarvit in Cupar, Fife. Since then, its UK hospice network has grown, with nine hospices now offering in-patient and out-patient care and a broad range of day therapies to meet the needs of individual patients.

As others have said, the two Scottish hospices are in Glasgow and in my constituency of Edinburgh Pentlands, at Fairmilehead. I have visited that hospice on many occasions, the most recent time being only two weeks ago, when I took part in the lights to remember event.

In the past year, the Marie Curie Edinburgh hospice and the West Lothian care-at-home team supported a total of 1,690 patients through their in-patient, out-patient, community and day therapy services. I should point out that my wife is a district nurse who provides palliative care to patients in West Lothian and works alongside the Marie Curie care-at-home team, which provides support to those individuals.

Demand for the service is increasing as Scotland's population is ageing, with the census highlighting that, between 2001 and 2021, the over-65s had increased from 16 per cent of Scotland's population to 20 per cent, which is an increase of nearly 267,000 people in that age category. Although, compared with previous decades, life expectancy for men and women is increasing, there is a downside in that those who are over 65 have more health problems and the amount of time that is spent in ill health is also rising. That puts pressure on our health service, including those who are working to improve end-of-life care.

The Marie Curie report "How many people need palliative care?" provides basic estimates of the future need and indicates that there will be a significantly higher need for palliative care in the future. The report states:

"The methods used in this report can provide a headcount of how many people in the population need palliative care, but they do not indicate what the service implications are for meeting this need, what the gap is between need and the current provision of care and services, or which groups or individuals are most likely to

miss out. More research is needed to model population need for different types of services, alongside improved data on service access, outcomes, and patient and carer experiences.”

Bob Doris: The member is making a crucial point. Does he agree that my point about the weaker support networks in deprived communities and the more numerous financial vulnerabilities in those communities means that we might need to put more intensive support into those particular areas when we are mapping need and provision in relation to palliative and end-of-life care?

Gordon MacDonald: I totally agree with that, and I will come to that point in two seconds.

I welcome the announcement in the report that Marie Curie will commission research to help answer the questions of population need for different types of services, alongside improved data on service access outcomes and patient and carer experiences.

It is important that we better understand what support people require as they reach the last few months of life. Therefore, I welcome the Scottish Government’s creation of a strategy steering group to oversee the development and delivery of a new palliative and end-of-life care strategy. The aim is to ensure that everyone in Scotland receives

“well-coordinated, timely and high-quality palliative care, care around death and bereavement support based on their needs and preferences including support for families and carers.”

The strategy will also aim to understand and respond to issues of financial insecurity, housing and employment, and it will provide information in accessible formats for everyone who requires end-of-life care, and their families.

I thank the dedicated staff at Fairmilehead Marie Curie hospice, who will be working over Christmas and new year, for all that they do to support those people who are reaching the end of their lives.

14:18

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank Bob Doris for bringing this important debate to the chamber.

Everyone deserves as pain-free and peaceful a death as possible, surrounded by those who love them, in a place that comforts them and in which the choice is theirs. We can all agree that, at some point, we will all be touched by the death of a loved one, and that, should that loved one need end-of-life care over a period of time—palliative care—we would all wish that to be provided in the best way possible, by trained and sensitive care staff, who, as Bob Doris indicated, are passionate about what they do and have the knowledge, time

and training to support not only the physical side of our loved one’s deterioration but their emotional needs and those of the wider family.

As we have heard, since its inception in 1948, Marie Curie has developed to do just that. I welcome the commitment of Marie Curie to working with those at the end of life. Nowadays, Marie Curie works not only in hospices but in people’s homes, in our communities and with our NHS. My South Scotland region is served by NHS Ayrshire and Arran, NHS Borders and NHS Dumfries and Galloway. I know that patients and staff from all of those health boards hold that working relationship in high regard.

The report that others have mentioned talks about numbers of visits. In my region, in 2022-23, 59 people in NHS Ayrshire and Arran were seen, 95 people in NHS Borders were seen and there were more than 4,000 visits in NHS Dumfries and Galloway. Every number represents a person who may be in pain and feeling overwhelmed and lonely as they approach those last days of life. Like others in the chamber, I am thankful that we have a dedicated organisation such as Marie Curie, which does its best to provide visits to patients, often in very challenging circumstances.

I will raise three issues that have been touched on by others and that really struck me about the provision of end-of-life care and the provision of hospice care in 2023, as we go into 2024. We can all agree that it is valuable work and a service that we want to continue. For that to be a reality, we need to address the issue of funding. We have heard that statutory funding has not kept pace and that hospices across Scotland face a £16 million deficit. We need the Scottish Government to make clear what steps it can take to support the funding of hospices. That links to my next point, which is about staffing.

We all agree that hospice staff are trained to the highest level and need to be seen on a par with NHS colleagues.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): On the point about funding, the member will recognise the immense public goodwill for hospice care across Scotland. That was exemplified by the efforts to rebuild the Marie Curie hospice in Glasgow, which raised £16 million around 10 years ago, more than half of which was from readers of the *Evening Times*. That shows the level of public goodwill to support hospices, but, as the member says, with increasing demand, that kind of fundraising is not sustainable to grow the capacity that we need. The state needs to intervene.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Carol Mochan, I can give you the time back.

Carol Mochan: That is a very well-made point. We have addressed how much Scottish people

value hospices, and they would do everything that they can to ensure that that funding continues. Therefore, we, in the Parliament, have a responsibility, as does the Government, to do everything that we can to fill that funding gap and have the sustainable plan that Bob Doris and others mentioned.

We need to not only value the work of our colleagues in hospices but recognise the pay gap and ensure that it does not continue. We do not want to lose staff or discourage people from moving to the sector, because it is so important.

Finally, I will raise a point that I have raised many times in the chamber, which is the injustice of inequality. Others have mentioned it, so I will not labour the point. Members have spoken about the dying in the margins exhibition, and we all know that a picture expresses 1,000 words. The richest of us can often afford to stay at home and receive daily care directly in the places in which we have lived and prospered, but for those who have suffered through their life and struggled to make ends meet, often no such option exists. They leave their life with the same sense of powerlessness that they had in aspects during their life. It is simply not right that that happens.

Surely, in a time of need such as the end of life, we must look to find solutions to provide all the care and comfort necessary.

14:24

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): Thank you, Deputy Presiding Officer, for the opportunity to speak in the debate. I, too, will start by paying tribute to Bob Doris for bringing the motion to the chamber today, to celebrate the 75th anniversary of Marie Curie. It was great to hear from our colleague Gordon MacDonald, because one of my earliest memories of being an MSP was when Gordon MacDonald and I met at Ainslie Park swimming pool, in my constituency, to throw our support behind a swimathon to raise money for Marie Curie.

I say that to pay tribute to all those who have undertaken fundraising initiatives over the past 75 years to support the work of Marie Curie. I was invited by Marie Curie to support that fundraising initiative along with Gordon MacDonald. Gordon MacDonald talked about the hospice in his constituency. Marie Curie's offices are in my constituency of Edinburgh Northern and Leith, at Links Place. The reason I wanted to mention that and speak today is to pay tribute not just to those who provide palliative care, which others have rightly emphasised, but to the organisational and policy teams at Marie Curie.

During my time as an MSP, those teams have made a significant contribution to a range of

parliamentary considerations and activities, including this debate. I remember Marie Curie's input during the passing of the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018, which is a better piece of legislation because of Marie Curie's input, along with that of many other stakeholders. Since the passing of the act, the implementation of social security in Scotland has benefited from much advice, ideas and emphasis on certain areas from Marie Curie. We recognise the huge contribution that Marie Curie has made over its years of existence to providing and enhancing palliative care and making the case for palliative care. Throughout that time, and particularly in recent years, the policy team has, in relation to the experience that I can advocate for, made an important difference to the process of policy making and law making.

14:26

The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto): I, too, thank Bob Doris for lodging the motion for the debate, and I thank members in the chamber for their contributions. Mr Doris has been a champion of our palliative care for many years now, as is evident in his role as co-convenor of the cross-party group on palliative care alongside Miles Briggs, and through his tireless work inside and outside the chamber to support Marie Curie and other hospice services.

I agree with the many members who have said that it is poignant to be here today having this debate. It would also be remiss of me, particularly given my role as the minister for women's health, if I did not pay tribute to the woman who made all this possible, Marie Curie herself. Her life was dedicated to science and advancing our knowledge of medical physics. She is an inspiration to me and, I know, to many women across the world. Like the organisation that bears her name, we have much to thank her for.

If you might indulge me, Presiding Officer, I will quote Marie Curie:

"Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood. Now is the time to understand more, so that we may fear less."

That is particularly poignant, given the subjects that we are talking about in the debate.

I congratulate Marie Curie on its achievements over the past 75 years, and the staff and volunteers who have pioneered palliative and end-of-life care. Marie Curie has provided invaluable support to people and their families at the most challenging points of their lives, as well as supporting other health and social care services and teams delivering palliative care and end-of-life care.

I note Ben Macpherson's point about the importance of Marie Curie's policy team supporting the Social Security (Scotland) Act 1998, and I know that it has a lot to engage with on palliative care.

Many colleagues across the chamber have reflected how much Marie Curie's services mean to them, their families and their constituents. That highlights the broad scope and reach of Marie Curie's work, and why it is so important. As Carol Mochan says, it is delivered in hospices, in communities and in people's own homes.

Bob Doris's motion highlights the increased need and complexity of palliative care that is projected by Marie Curie research up to 2040. We reflected on that during Sue Webber's members' business debate earlier this month, and in the debate that we had on the cost of dying. Those issues were discussed in the context of sustainable hospice care to meet future need. As Bob Doris said, Marie Curie is well placed to help with that challenge. In 2022-23 alone, Marie Curie has delivered care and support to more than 8,000 people across Scotland. Therefore, it is vital that we learn from the wealth of experience that organisations such as Marie Curie bring to inform our work and support the development of sustainable, high-quality palliative and end-of-life care services.

As I have said before, I have made it a priority to meet or visit a number of hospices, as well as convening the round-table event on 5 December with Marie Curie, among all the other independent hospices in Scotland, and health and social care partnership chief officers.

Discussion at that meeting was open, frank and valued by participants, who noted that that was the first time that such a dialogue had been opened. They were grateful for the chance to discuss those important issues, even though the financial situation remains challenging. I recognise the £15.5 million gap. I will strive to help where I can. Because health and social care partnerships are responsible for planning and commissioning adult palliative care services, we have been engaging with them to explore solutions and options for longer-term sustainable planning and funding for hospices.

At the meeting, colleagues also welcomed our wider work on the development of a new palliative care strategy. There are real opportunities to address the commissioning of independent hospice care through wider consideration of national and local leadership, responsibility and accountability by the strategy steering group, which was established to oversee the development and delivery of the new strategy.

Miles Briggs: One of the key issues that we need to address is the fact that, before health and social care integration, a chief executive's letter provided the certainty and opportunity for our hospice sector to fund the work that it does. Is the minister considering whether that could be reformed as part of the national care service to achieve the sustainable funding that the sector desperately needs?

Jenni Minto: I note Miles Briggs's intervention. The care service does not sit within my remit, but I will discuss that with Ms Todd.

The aim is to publish the new strategy for consultation in spring 2024. Marie Curie is a key partner in our strategy steering group, along with the Scottish hospice leadership group and CHAS. We have all agreed a shared aim that everyone in Scotland should receive well-co-ordinated, timely and high-quality palliative care around death and bereavement support, based on their needs and preferences, including support for families and carers.

I appreciate Evelyn Tweed's comments regarding rural and island areas, given where I live. I know that Marie Curie nurses operate in my constituency, and we need to recognise inequalities across Scotland, as Gordon MacDonald highlighted.

We also have a shared commitment to equitable and timely access to general and specialist palliative care services, as needed by each person of any age living with any illness in all places. As Carol Mochan said, it is about putting the individual at the heart. The key question is how to achieve timely and equitable access.

I am keen that we continue to focus our improvements through the development and delivery of the new palliative care strategy. We will build on the research published by Marie Curie and develop a strategy based on evidence—including our wider analysis of current and projected needs and our mapping of governance, services and support—and underpinned by what matters to people and their families based on their understanding and experiences of palliative care. It will be important for the strategy's steering group members to continue to engage, as they are already doing, with the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill and the forthcoming human rights bill.

We want people to receive care where they feel most comfortable, wherever possible.

Bob Doris: I apologise for interrupting the minister. I am listening carefully to what she is saying. She mentioned that the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill is Ms Todd's responsibility. The human rights bill will be another minister's responsibility. Ms Minto has a cross-cutting

responsibility for palliative and end-of-life care. So that representations do not get fragmented as we move forward, what assurances can the minister give that there will be a single point of contact for MSPs who wish to progress this matter in Parliament on a cross-party basis?

Jenni Minto: Mr Doris makes a good point about who is the right person to speak to, which I recognised when I was on the back benches. I will take that away and make sure that we have absolute clarity on which minister is the appropriate one to contact.

I will start my last sentence again. We want people to receive care where they feel most comfortable, wherever possible. For many, but not all, that will be at home, supported by their family, friends and care staff. For some, it will be in a hospice. I again thank all who work in Marie Curie for the commitment and dedication that they show each day, often in extremely challenging and upsetting circumstances. I offer my personal thanks for all that they do on every day of the year.

I conclude with another Marie Curie quote, which I will certainly consider over the Christmas break:

“One never notices what has been done; one can only see what remains to be done.”

On that note, I wish everyone a very happy Christmas and a good new year when it comes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate. I take the opportunity to be the last to wish all in the chamber and in the gallery—in particular, all those with a connection to Marie Curie—a merry Christmas and a happy and healthy 2024.

With that, I close this meeting.

Meeting closed at 14:35.

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