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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 13 March 2024

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

Portfolio Question Time

Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): Good afternoon. The first item of business is portfolio questions, and the first portfolio is rural affairs, land reform and islands. Members seeking to ask a supplementary question should press their request-to-speak button or enter the letters RTS in the chat function during the relevant question.

Agriculture Budget

1. Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government when the remaining £46 million of deferred funding from the agriculture budget will be returned. (S6O-03182)

The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie): The 2024-25 budget returns £15 million in capital to provide important support to our rural communities, and the Deputy First Minister has committed to returning the remaining £46 million in full in future years. The remaining ring-fenced funds will be returned in full at the right time for specific measures that will help the transformation of Scotland's farming and food production industry. That does not impact on the existing commitments or schemes, and the appropriate profile for returning the remaining £46 million of ring-fenced funding will be considered as part of a future budget process.

Douglas Lumsden: The minister's response of "At some time" gives no comfort to all our farmers.

At the National Farmers Union Scotland conference, the First Minister could not say when the £46 million would be returned to the agriculture budget. Since then, the Scottish Government has had an extra £295 million in Barnett consequentials from Westminster. Can the minister tell us how much of that extra money will go to repay the £46 million taken from our farmers?

Jim Fairlie: It never ceases to amaze me that the Tory party can come here and make comments about the £293 million, which is almost a couple of hundred million pounds less than what the figure should have been for the national health service consequentials. Some £230 million of that

money will go to the NHS to counter the cuts that we have already faced.

Douglas Lumsden: What about the ring-fenced money?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Let the minister respond, please.

Jim Fairlie: The ring-fenced money has already been allocated or will be allocated in the future. While £15 million has been returned to the budget, the other £46 million will be coming in future budgets, once the Scottish Government can work out its priorities after the savage cuts that have been made by the Tory United Kingdom Government.

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): Does the minister agree that capital investment is vital if we are to transform how we support farming and food production in Scotland, so that we help farmers and crofters invest in improved slurry storage and take action to tackle climate-related issues such as water scarcity and flooding? How does the failure of the Westminster Tory Government to provide any additional capital for Scotland in the budget affect our plans to become a global leader in sustainable and regenerative agriculture?

Jim Fairlie: The UK Government failed to provide any additional capital funding for Scotland or our rural communities. Indeed, our capital budget is expected to fall by nearly 9 per cent in real terms, which is a cumulative loss of more than £1.3 billion to 2027-28.

In contrast, the European Union's common agricultural policy provided a multi-annual programme budget over a seven-year period, with flexibility to use capital or resource spend. The UK Government offers only yearly allocations that fail to provide adequate EU replacement funding or a commitment on future spend on agricultural support, which requires long-term certainty. We need clarity and certainty from the UK Government right now about future rural funding after 2025, because we have no idea right now whether it will be the Tories or Labour in government, and neither of them is committing to supporting rural Scotland.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): The minister will be well aware how appalled those in the farming industry will be at the fact that he is unable to say when the money will be returned to the budget. Is the minister aware of any other budget within the Government's budget that is being raided in that way?

Jim Fairlie: Liam McArthur is well aware that every budget has been under pressure because of the savage cuts that have come from the UK Government. Cabinet secretaries across the

Government are all trying to find ways of pulling in their horns to ensure that we can deliver a balanced budget, as has been done every year since the Scottish National Party came into government; indeed, the Scottish Government has balanced its budget every single year. Everybody's budget is under strain.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before I call the next question, I remind members that this is a question-and-answer session so, after the question is asked, we listen to the answer.

Local Rural Economies (Housing)

2. Ash Regan (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba): To ask the Scottish Government, in relation to its rural delivery plan, what discussions the rural affairs secretary has had with ministerial colleagues regarding the impact of its housing strategies, including the rural housing action plan, on local rural economies. (S6O-03183)

The Minister for Housing (Paul McLennan): The Scottish Government's rural delivery plan will set out how all parts of the Scottish Government will deliver for Scotland's rural and island communities. The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands co-chairs the ministerial working group for the plan; the group has been established to drive activity and ensure cohesive delivery, and I am a member of it.

Ash Regan: I am not sure that the action plan is in fact delivering for local communities across Scotland. I want to raise the issue of hotspot areas in the Highlands that are experiencing extreme pressure, due to the number of second homes. In some areas, the proportion of second homes is approaching 60 per cent, which is creating a number of difficulties, as I am sure members in the chamber understand. There is difficulty in recruiting people into public services such as teaching and the national health service, because there is quite literally no accommodation for those people. As the current policies are not working, perhaps it is time for the Government to consider giving communities the power to decide when the level of second homes is getting too high.

Paul McLennan: A number of initiatives are under way. The member will be aware of the recent legislation that gave local authorities the ability to double council tax for second homes. Short-term lets control areas are also an option for local authorities, and they can be specific about what they do with them. The £25 million key workers fund is available, too. I should say that Richard Lochhead and I had a round-table discussion with various local authorities and employers a few months ago, and we have a follow-up meeting coming up to talk about support in that area.

There are also economic development opportunities around renewables hubs, and we have had discussions with Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks and SP Energy Networks about, first of all, temporary accommodation units and how we can provide legacy units beyond that. A lot of work is going on. We are also working very closely with Highlands and Islands Enterprise and South of Scotland Enterprise on combining economic development and growth with housing opportunities.

As I have said, considering short-term lets control areas is key, and each local authority has the ability to bring those things forward and apply them specifically.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I have requests for supplementary questions from three members. I hope to take all three, if we can have reasonably brief questions and answers.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): That is all talk from Minister McLennan. The house-building record of this Scottish National Party Government has been dreadful, with rural areas away from the central belt bearing the brunt of its failures. Over the course of the 2016 parliamentary session, the Scottish Government promised to spend £25 million on rural house building but failed to do so. Will the minister confirm whether the SNP Government has finally met that pledge eight years later? What further steps will he take to scale up rural house building?

Paul McLennan: That is bare-faced cheek from the Conservatives. It comes back to the capital budget being cut—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Members, we must hear the minister who has the floor. Minister, please resume.

Paul McLennan: I will, if they will let me answer. First, I will provide a bit of context. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Minister, please resume your seat. We are not going to make much progress and the net result will be that I will be able to call fewer members to ask supplementary questions, and indeed might not even get to all the questions on the *Business Bulletin*.

Minister, please resume.

Paul McLennan: There are a couple of things to say. The capital budget has been cut by 10 per cent, as the member will know, and there has been a financial transactions cut of 62 per cent in one year. I point out that 40 per cent more homes are being delivered per head of population than in England, and 70 per cent more than in Wales, and the Scottish Government has delivered 10,000 houses in rural areas over a number of years.

I have already touched on areas that we are looking at, including short-term accommodation for key workers and economic development opportunities with SSEN and SPEN, and how we develop them. Scotland has a proud record—indeed, its delivery record compared with England and Wales is outstanding—but the easiest and quickest way to build more houses would be for the UK Government to reverse that capital budget cut.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

The Scottish Government has announced a £205 million cut in real terms to the affordable housing supply budget, despite the lack of affordable housing being consistently raised as a top concern in rural areas and consistently considered a cause of depopulation. The minister knows that it is more expensive to build in rural areas, so can he reassure me and the Parliament that the promise outlined in the rural housing action plan to deliver 11,000 affordable homes by 2032 will truly be delivered in rural areas?

Paul McLennan: That is a very important point. The target is to deliver roughly 20 per cent more homes in rural areas. I point out that there has been construction inflation of 20 per cent over the last year or so. In previous debates, we have talked about 10 per cent more homes equating to about 11,000 homes; that is the important part of this, as is the fact that 10 per cent is the minimum amount.

Actions were set out in the rural housing action plan last year. The short-term actions are to take place over about nine months, and then we go beyond that to the actions that will take place in medium and longer term. We are still working on those objectives.

We are working very closely with SSEN on renewable development opportunities. We will also come back to look at short-term accommodation requirements and the longer-term legacy of that housing, and work is going on with Highlands and Islands Enterprise on that. The rural delivery plan plays an important part, too; after all, housing drives economic development and economic development drives housing, so the plans have to work closely together. I am happy to meet the member to discuss that and other specific related issues.

Kate Forbes (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): I agree with Ash Regan on the importance of community groups in resolving the housing crisis; indeed, the fact that so many communities have delivered excellent housing developments across the Highlands proves that. A number of communities have approached me in recent days, not least Elgol. Is the minister open to engaging with those community groups about progressing such developments?

Paul McLennan: The member has raised a very important point. The Communities Housing Trust was awarded nearly £1 million to deliver capacity for local communities. I have already met people from a number of communities in Kate Forbes's constituency area, and will continue to do so, and I am very happy to take the issue up with the member and meet people from the community that she has mentioned.

Wildlife Crime

3. **Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reports of rising wildlife crime across Scotland. (S6O-03184)

The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity

(Jim Fairlie): The Scottish Government has always been clear that wildlife crime is unacceptable. We have implemented a number of important changes in recent years to tackle wildlife crime, including increasing the maximum penalties for the most serious wildlife crimes and strengthening the laws around hunting with dogs.

The Wildlife Management and Muirburn (Scotland) Bill contains a number of key changes to help tackle instances of wildlife crime, including the persecution of raptors occurring on some grouse moors. I encourage anyone with information relating to any wildlife crime to report it to Police Scotland.

Liam Kerr: The Scottish Government is set, in the bill that was referenced, to grant additional powers to the Scottish Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals to investigate wildlife crime, but rural communities nevertheless expect Police Scotland to play a role, too. What research has the Scottish Government done on the impact of outsourcing policing on evidence and convictions, and what impact is having those powers projected to have on the SSPCA's other duties and purposes?

Jim Fairlie: The member is talking about a part of the bill that will be decided on next Tuesday, and I am delighted that he has taken such an interest in it, given that there has been a lot of discussion and debate about the bill across the chamber. We are getting to the heart of where the bill will be, which is right in the proper place, and I welcome and look forward to the Conservatives voting for it.

The SSPCA's powers are very limited and will be carried out in a concordat with the police. The organisations will work together to ensure that crimes that are reported can be progressed slightly beyond the point at which the SSPCA has been able to in the past, but the police will still carry out the final investigation.

Island Connectivity

4. John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):

To ask the Scottish Government what cross-Government action it is taking to improve island connectivity, in order to support measures to increase the population of Scotland's islands. (S6O-03185)

The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie): The very first strategic objective in the national islands plan commits the Scottish Government to addressing population decline to ensure a balanced population profile for our islands, and the recent addressing depopulation action plan sets out how we will work with regional, local and community partners to deliver a sustainable solution to those challenges.

Our recently published draft "Islands Connectivity Plan—Strategic Approach" paper proposes a vision that Scotland's ferry services—supported by other transport modes—should be safe, reliable, affordable and inclusive for residents, businesses and visitors, enabling transport connectivity, sustainability and growth of island and peninsula communities and populations. The draft strategic approach paper is open for public consultation until 3 May, and I encourage responses.

John Mason: Would the minister agree that the population of Scotland's islands is not only a challenge for the people on the islands, but a challenge for the whole country, even for those in cities, such as myself? Would he encourage young people, as they think about their career, to at least consider spending some of their time working and living on the islands?

Jim Fairlie: I absolutely agree with that sentiment. The islands are profoundly important and contribute positively to our cultural heritage, environment, economy and national identity. Despite the challenges, islands are great places to live for our young people. That is why encouraging young people to stay within our rural and island communities or to move there is a priority in the addressing depopulation action plan.

As someone who has lived in a rural community, I know that such communities have a different sense and a different feel. Living in them is different from the way in which people normally live in a town, but there is a fantastic community feel in islands and rural communities that I encourage people to look at. That is why we are working with Youth Scotland and the young islanders network to consider how to best address population decline through co-developing ideas and actions to support and encourage young people to remain on, move to or return to the islands. We will also work to increase young people's participation in community councils,

which could empower young people to inform improvements to services in their area, making rural communities far more attractive places for them to live and work.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): The exciting development of SaxaVord spaceport will play a vital role in the country's space industry. However, to get to the spaceport in Unst, people have to take two ferries from Shetland's mainland. Does the minister agree that cross-Government action on short subsea tunnels between Shetland's islands would improve connectivity and reverse depopulation, as our Nordic neighbours have found with their tunnel projects?

Jim Fairlie: I have to say to Beatrice Wishart that that is not something that I have heard about, but I would be keen to engage with her about it, and I am more than happy to meet and talk to her after this session.

Crop Damage (Beavers)

5. **Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what support is available to farmers who have experienced damage to crops as a result of the activities of beavers. (S6O-03186)

The Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity (Lorna Slater): Beavers burrowing into flood banks can exacerbate flooding in some areas, but in other circumstances beavers can reduce flood risks. I will be visiting a farm in Perthshire next week with NFU Scotland to discuss the flood damage and how that may have been exacerbated by beaver activity.

Farm viability and livelihoods can go hand in hand with delivering for nature and climate. However, that cannot be at the expense of farm incomes. NatureScot has mitigation measures available and we are exploring long-term solutions to key issues, such as increasing the resilience of river banks to flooding events.

Murdo Fraser: When the minister visits farmers in Perthshire, she will be aware, as the minister beside her, Jim Fairlie, is well aware, that there are also farmers alongside rivers such as the Tay, the Arran, the Ericht and the Isla who have suffered significant loss due to flooding and damage to crops due to beavers eroding traditional flood banks.

It was the Scottish Government that decided, against the wishes of many in the farming community, to reintroduce beavers and to give them protected status. Does the minister accept that that puts a moral obligation on the Government to fully compensate affected farmers for the losses that they suffer?

Lorna Slater: Beavers are native to Scotland, and their re-establishment will play an important role in restoring Scotland's natural environment. We are looking at how the Scottish Government and NatureScot can further support farmers to host beavers. There are opportunities to do that through the upcoming changes to agricultural support.

In my visit to Perthshire next week, we will be talking about mitigation plans and about what is available for farmers. Beaver licences will continue to be available to deal with serious risks where there are no feasible alternatives for beaver management. Of course, we also need long-term flood management, which would include things such as natural flood management and the realignment of flood banks, to help mitigate beaver issues.

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): I welcome the recent reintroduction of beavers in the Cairngorms national park, which has the dual benefit of facilitating translocation into a suitable habitat and providing an alternative to lethal control. What measures are being taken by the Cairngorms National Park Authority to support farmers to mitigate any impacts to their businesses?

Lorna Slater: The release of beavers in the Cairngorms national park represents a key milestone in ensuring that beavers, as an iconic species and as ecosystem engineers, can once again thrive across Scotland. The Cairngorms National Park Authority has produced a management and mitigation plan that reflects land managers' primary concerns. The park authority's commitment to fund small-scale mitigation activities and remedial works adds significant extra resource on top of the national mitigation scheme that is operated by NatureScot. That approach has been commended outside the farming sector.

Proposed Land Reform Bill

6. Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its progress towards introducing its proposed land reform bill. (S6O-03187)

The Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity (Lorna Slater): As outlined by the First Minister in September, the current programme for government includes a commitment to introduce a new land reform bill. Although I cannot comment on the contents of the bill ahead of its introduction to the Parliament, it will further improve transparency of land ownership, help to ensure that large-scale landholdings deliver in the public interest and empower communities by providing them with

more opportunities to own land and have more say in how land in their area is used.

Kevin Stewart: I recognise that many think that land reform is a rural matter. Could the minister give us an outline of how the contents of the bill will benefit people who are in urban settings who want to bring land and buildings into community ownership?

Lorna Slater: We strongly support community ownership for all communities, which is why, in 2015, the Scottish Government extended the right to buy to urban areas through the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015. We have also extended eligibility for the Scottish land fund to groups in urban areas. Since then, there has been a steady increase in successful applications from community groups in towns and cities across Scotland. A review of the provisions in legislation for the community right to buy will begin this summer, following the introduction of the land reform bill. It will cover the legislative and procedural aspects of the community right to buy and will report at the end of 2025.

Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act 2022

7. Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the rural affairs secretary has had with the health secretary regarding implementing the commitments contained within the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act 2022. (S6O-03188)

The Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity (Lorna Slater): The ministerial working group on food is the mechanism for cross-portfolio discussions and decision making on food-related policy at a ministerial level. Health interests are represented on that group by the Minister for Public Health and Women's Health. The good food nation plan has been discussed at all the in-person meetings of that group. The group has also worked by correspondence to review and approve the consultation draft.

Emma Harper: The Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act 2022 sets out a vision for Scotland to be a nation

"where people ... take pride and pleasure in, and benefit from, the food they produce",

purchase and prepare. In order to achieve that aim, it is vital for the rural affairs secretary and the health secretary to work together to support high-quality producers and address ultra-processed foods and foods that are high in fat, sugar and salt, which are detrimental to health. Can the minister reaffirm that cross-portfolio working will continue to take place? Will she comment on whether the good food nation commitments will be enacted?

Lorna Slater: The good food nation plan reflects the importance of cross-portfolio working in order to achieve our vision of Scotland as a good food nation. The plan describes the key focus to achieve our vision of Scotland as a good food nation and details the working mechanisms that are in place to support that. The final version of the plan is due to be published in 2025. However, there is on-going work on the outcomes. For example, there is an open consultation on proposed regulations to restrict promotions of food and drink that is high in fat, sugar and salt, in line with our public health priority to create a Scotland in which everyone eats well.

Fishing Industry (Support)

8. Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on what steps it is taking to support the fishing industry. (S6O-03189)

The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie): As set out in the answers to previous questions on the subject, the Scottish Government continues to support and manage Scotland's vital fishing industry in a number of ways. We continue to deliver the actions in our 10-year fisheries management strategy, with an update to the strategy's delivery plan due for publication later this year. The strategy is underpinned by the funding that we continue to provide through marine fund Scotland and the various functions that we deliver to ensure that our fishing industry can operate sustainably and effectively.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: Last year, the fishing sector asked the Scottish Government to consider a derogation to the North Sea cod avoidance plan in order to allow fishing for squid inside 12 nautical miles. As the Scottish Government officials recognised in their correspondence with the fisheries management and conservation group on 5 July last year, it is a lucrative fishery that can take pressure off nephrops grounds. However, no derogation was granted last year and the industry still has not been advised whether a derogation will be granted this year—something that the industry ideally needs to know by the end of this month. Can the minister confirm that a derogation is being considered? When will a decision on that derogation be made?

Jim Fairlie: The Scottish Government wants to restore marine habitats in Scotland's inshore waters and provide a higher chance of stock recovery and sustainable fisheries in the future. However, I understand that the issue is complex and there are strong views on both sides, and the decision to remove exemptions was not taken lightly.

The answer to the member's specific question will have to come from the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands, and I will ask her to respond to the member directly.

Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): Does the minister agree that we would be far better able to support all of Scotland's fishing industry had the Westminster Tory Government kept its much-repeated Brexit promise to fully replace all European Union marine funding?

Jim Fairlie: I absolutely agree with that sentiment. I do not have the figures in front of me just now, but I know that the EU funding has been grossly cut by the United Kingdom Government and the Scottish fishers were far better off when we were part of the EU.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions on rural affairs, land reform and islands.

NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next portfolio is national health service recovery, health and social care. I remind all members that if they wish to ask a supplementary question, they should press their request-to-speak button, or enter the letters RTS in the chat function, during the relevant question.

Belford Hospital (Replacement)

1. Kate Forbes (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with NHS Highland about progressing planning and design work for the new Belford hospital in Fort William. (S6O-03190)

The Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care (Neil Gray): Officials met with NHS Highland in January to discuss the development of new projects, including the new Belford hospital. As colleagues will be aware, the Chancellor of the Exchequer ignored the Deputy First Minister's call to increase capital funding for our national health service, so we are still facing a real-terms cut of nearly 8.7 per cent in capital funding over the medium term, until 2027-28. We will continue to work with NHS Highland to make progress where we can, in the face of that lack of capital from the United Kingdom Government budget, but Kate Forbes will understand the challenge that is before us.

Kate Forbes: I absolutely understand the challenge that the health secretary and indeed the whole Government are dealing with. He will be aware that, at a time of constrained public finances, it is all the more important to use funding

that progresses work as far as possible and not waste the previous funding and effort that have gone into bringing the project to the current point. To that end, how much money has the health board asked the Scottish Government for to continue the design work on the new Belford hospital?

Neil Gray: Discussions are on-going, and it is essential that NHS boards continue to plan for how they will improve and reform services. We remain committed to supporting them in that process by exploring all funding options that are available to progress projects, as capital projects such as the Belford will clearly assist with patient outcomes and productivity and will thereby assist our NHS recovery.

The UK Government cuts to our capital budget have resulted in new health capital projects being paused. We know that the situation remains challenging, as Kate Forbes highlighted, as many projects around the country are under review. Both the Deputy First Minister and I are working through that challenge, but colleagues will appreciate that that may take some time, as we look at all options. I will do what I can to keep Kate Forbes updated, given her understandable interest and concern.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Fort William is the outdoor capital of the UK, and yet a helicopter taking a casualty from the hills cannot land at its hospital. The people of Lochaber have been promised a new hospital for more than two decades. Will the Scottish Government make good on that promise?

Neil Gray: I thank Rhoda Grant for that question, and I understand the concern that she expressed. The need for a new hospital there has been set out, as Kate Forbes articulated. The issue that we have is the financial reality that we face. The costs of these projects have risen, with spiralling UK inflation—which is not the fault of NHS boards or the Scottish Government—and a constrained capital budget, in which £1.3 billion is being removed up until 2027-28. The financial reality is, therefore, that these projects must be reviewed, through the process that is currently being undertaken by the Deputy First Minister and me, in order that we can take forward as many as possible.

ADHD Medication Supplies

2. Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the availability of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder medication supplies in Scotland. (S6O-03191)

The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto): Various attention deficit hyperactivity disorder medicines, a number of

which are manufactured by Takeda Pharmaceuticals, continue to experience limited and intermittent supplies, with market data indicating that supplies will stabilise between March and the end of May 2024. The shortages are caused by a combination of manufacturing issues and increase in demand. The pricing and supply of medicines is reserved to the United Kingdom Government, and we continue to engage with it on the issue.

The Scottish Government recognises the impact of the global shortages on people who are living with ADHD and their families. NHS Scotland has robust systems in place to manage medicine shortages when they arise. Anyone who is affected by the issue should speak to their clinical team.

Rona Mackay: During a recent event that I sponsored in the Scottish Parliament, I had the opportunity to meet a young girl with ADHD who expressed concerns about her medication. She shared her experience of having to skip medication days. Can the minister advise on measures to ensure that no child with ADHD needs to skip their medication days?

Jenni Minto: I thank Rona Mackay for raising the issue in the chamber. I am sorry to hear about the situation in which the young girl to whom she spoke finds herself.

A UK-wide national patient safety alert is in place for medicines that are used for the treatment of ADHD. It advises healthcare professionals of the shortage and provides information on alternative suitable medication where appropriate. Restrictions have been introduced that prohibit a number of medicines for the treatment of ADHD from being exported from the UK or stockpiled, to protect supplies. The chief pharmaceutical officer for Scotland is a member of a UK-wide medicine shortage response group, which has been set up to identify and co-ordinate responses to medicine shortages and provide advice to clinicians on alternative therapeutic options.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): The shortage of ADHD medication supplies is causing distress for people who advocated tirelessly to get a diagnosis in the first place. One constituent of mine first sought a diagnosis in 2008 and was finally diagnosed privately with ADHD in 2023, but she will shortly run out of the medication that she needs. What consideration has the Scottish Government given to exploring new procurement options for drugs such as lisdexamphetamine, given the production issues that the current supplier faces?

Jenni Minto: As I said in my response to the original question, the UK Government remains responsible for medicine supply. However, the

Scottish Government is in close dialogue with all health boards to manage the shortage and provide support where necessary.

Health Budget

3. Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to a recent report from the Institute for Fiscal Studies, which states that the 2024-25 budget implied a real-terms reduction to health spending. (S6O-03192)

The Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care (Neil Gray): The Scottish budget shows year-on-year real-terms growth in health funding when we compare the opening position. The budget document states the opening budget position for each financial year and allows direct comparison with the previous two years, which provides a consistent point of reference for the Parliament and stakeholders.

In fact, the IFS report also notes the real terms increase when comparing on a budget-to-budget basis. The report clearly underlines how important additional in-year funding is to maintaining real-terms growth. That funding is directly dependent on the United Kingdom Government prioritising additional health investment over the year, but we did not see it prioritised in the budget.

Liz Smith: I recognise that comparisons can be made with previous years, but the Institute for Fiscal Studies made the point that the Scottish Government's claim that health spending had increased by 1.3 per cent for 2024-25 did not include the top-up figures for the previous health budget in 2023-24. Does the cabinet secretary recognise that there is some inconsistency in that, and that that makes it more difficult to scrutinise budgets?

Neil Gray: No. As I said in my earlier answer, we provide budget-to-budget consistency so that there can be clear scrutiny. Given the pressures that we are currently under, I more than understand how important in-year consequentials are and I encourage the UK Government to continue to consider the call from international organisations to prioritise investment in public services instead of tax cuts, because that would allow us to further increase spending in our health service, which is much needed.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Liz Smith and the Conservatives seem to imply that, somehow, money could appear out of the magic money tree to fund the national health service in Scotland. Can the cabinet secretary clarify whether the NHS in England is much better funded?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Answer on matters within your responsibility, cabinet secretary.

Neil Gray: The decisions that are taken in the UK Government for the NHS in England have a direct consequence for the budget that we have in Scotland. The UK Government's figures show that the Department for Health and Social Care's budget for 2024-25 is 0.2 per cent less in real terms than in 2023-24. Those figures stand. In contrast, our 2024-25 budget provides a real-terms increase of almost 3 per cent for the NHS in Scotland, as we continue to prioritise front-line public services.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Patients and staff have been promised state-of-the-art national treatment centres for many years now, specifically to increase capacity and tackle the waiting list backlog. As a result of the real-terms reduction in health spending in the forthcoming financial year, the cabinet secretary has instructed health boards to halt all project plans. Now that the NHS recovery plan is in tatters, how does the cabinet secretary intend to clear the waiting list backlog?

Neil Gray: I do not accept the premise of Jackie Baillie's question. She is suggesting that it is decisions that we are making around the capital investment in our NHS that are detrimental to the national treatment centres project, but that is not the case. The situation is a direct consequence of the decisions that have been taken elsewhere, as we have seen nothing about a capital increase to our budget in the spring statement or, indeed, the autumn statement.

The national treatment centres are absolutely critical to our continued recovery, and I want to see them happening. However, as I said in my answer to Rhoda Grant's question, there is the financial reality of a diminishing budget from the UK Government and increased costs, which mean that we have to put those projects under review. Wishing it to be otherwise is not enough; we have to get on with looking at how we can fund those centres, which I am committed to considering as far as possible.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): What assessment has the Scottish Government made of health spending and the impact on front-line services and patients in rural and island areas, given the higher costs of delivering services to those areas?

Neil Gray: That is something that both I, as somebody who grew up in an island community, and the Government recognise. In negotiations with health boards, we will look at what we can do to provide on-going support around the disproportionate costs of delivery of their service.

That remains under constant review on a budget-to-budget basis.

National Health Service Dentistry (Dunoon)

4. Tim Eagle (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the availability of NHS dentistry for residents of Dunoon and its surrounding communities. (S6O-03193)

The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto): NHS Highland has recently been successful in recruiting to posts within the public dental service in Dunoon, which is currently providing NHS dental care for priority groups as well as emergency dental care. I also understand that the board has procured funding to establish a peripatetic service, which is expected to be in operation around Argyll and Bute this summer. The board has a dedicated dental helpline for patients in Argyll and Bute, which can provide advice on which practices are accepting new NHS patients in Highland and surrounding health boards, as well as further advice and support.

Tim Eagle: I appreciate that work has been ongoing. In response to a previous written question on the matter, the Government noted the opening of a new dental practice in Inverness. Although that might be welcome for residents there, it is hardly of comfort to residents in Dunoon, who are 174 miles, or four and a half hours, away—several deeply concerned residents have been contacting me about that. I appreciate that something has happened, but does the Scottish Government have other incentives to offer existing local practices to help increase their capacity and meet demand?

Jenni Minto: On Friday, I had conversations with a number of my constituents about dentistry in Dunoon and Cowal. I had hoped that a new dental practice would open in Dunoon, because there had been interest in one of the Government's Scottish dental access initiative grants, which gives £100,000 for a new practice to be opened. Unfortunately, the dentist who had previously expressed an interest in purchasing the practice via the grant has advised that they are no longer progressing the matter.

I mentioned the peripatetic unit, which I think will make a difference, and the board has advised me that it continues to seek expressions of interest for the grant and continues to engage regularly with local dental practice owners and dental corporate bodies regarding the provision of NHS dental services for communities in Dunoon and Cowal.

NHS Forth Valley Assurance and Improvement Plan

5. Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government when it last received an update on NHS Forth Valley's assurance and improvement plan. (S6O-03194)

The Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care (Neil Gray): The Scottish Government receives regular updates on NHS Forth Valley's assurance and improvement plan through the NHS Forth Valley assurance board, which last met on Friday 8 March 2024. Good progress is being made across all areas of leadership, culture and governance, and, given the strong focus on evidencing the improvements that are being made, I am hopeful—I am confident—that that will lead to de-escalation.

Minutes from the NHS Forth Valley assurance board meetings are published and can be viewed on the Scottish Government's website, www.gov.scot. A copy of the improvement plan is available on NHS Forth Valley's website.

Keith Brown: I acknowledge that progress is being made and that Forth Valley royal hospital performs well in, for example, elective care. As the local MSP, I continue to get a steady stream of very positive messages about the care that people are receiving, and we should acknowledge the work of the staff in that regard.

The cabinet secretary will be aware of the challenges that smaller health boards such as NHS Forth Valley face. Will he outline any further measures that the Scottish Government is taking to address that?

Neil Gray: I thank Keith Brown for his interest and for the information that he has passed on about direct patient experience, which is incredibly important. This is a challenging time for us all. I, too, recognise the progress that has been made in elective care, as well as the continued difficulties in, for example, unscheduled care and the challenges that smaller boards are facing more widely.

The Government is continuing close dialogue with boards to maximise performance and delivery locally. That is supported by strategic collaboration on financial and workforce planning. Practical measures from an NHS Scotland perspective include mobilising tailored improvement support from the national Centre for Sustainable Delivery, creating additional capacity through the new national treatment centres and targeting regional and national approaches, where appropriate, to support pressured services.

I recognise that, in NHS Forth Valley's case, improvements have been made. There is more to

do, and I am committed to providing as much support as I can so that that continues.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): It is unclear how the required improvements to urgent and unscheduled care at NHS Forth Valley will take place, and the picture on psychological therapies and children's mental health is extremely challenging. What improvements have been made and what action can be taken to ensure that patients are given the care that they require?

Neil Gray: I recognise Alexander Stewart's points and reiterate my points in response to Keith Brown about our providing support and intervention in those areas. Alexander Stewart is right to point to unscheduled care as a particular concern, which has been the case for a long time. I hope that we will see some improvements to NHS Forth Valley's figures in the weekly accident and emergency statistics. However, it is coming from a very low bar and we need there to be a much greater improvement. My commitment is to continue to support the board in the progress that is being made.

E-health Strategy

6. Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it will develop its e-health strategy in the coming years. (S6O-03195)

The Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care (Neil Gray): I can confirm that the Scottish Government's e-health strategy was replaced by a digital health and care strategy, which was published jointly with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities in 2018 and updated in 2021. The strategy is accompanied by an annual delivery plan, with the 2024-25 delivery plan scheduled to be published in April 2024. There are no plans to develop the strategy further in the immediate future.

Willie Coffey: One of the few benefits of the Covid pandemic was that we were able to embrace digital technology much more, which came to the rescue in many fields, not least in telehealth. Does the cabinet secretary agree that we must continue to develop and exploit the power of digital technology in our health service to help us to improve things such as general practice appointment systems, e-health digital consultations and general telehealth services, which are not only crucial for people who live in rural parts of Scotland but are valuable as a means of improving general access to all our national health services?

Neil Gray: Yes, I agree that further utilising innovation and technology will be a central element of reforming health and social care. I

agree that we should be exploring more opportunities for greater use of digital solutions. Some of that is about maximising the capabilities of our existing investments. For example, the new GP information technology system, which we are in the process of rolling out, gives GPs the ability to offer online booking services. We have already rolled out the Near Me service for online consultations.

Some of this is about exploring the art of the possible. Through the Scottish Funding Council, we have recently confirmed 10-year funding for the Digital Health and Care Innovation Centre to continue to lead our efforts to explore where those opportunities are.

I am grateful to Willie Coffey for raising the issue, because digital is an area in which we will need to spend much greater time and resource.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): As we attempt to tackle significant issues in our health service, I hear time and time again from our health boards that their outdated IT systems are a block to progress. A modern collaboration and communication platform is essential, to bring our health service back into a better state, especially in data gathering and the development of our e-health systems.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer committed in excess of £3 billion to develop healthcare tech. Will the cabinet secretary consider working with the United Kingdom Government to bring NHS Scotland's IT systems up to scratch and create a UK-wide communication and collaboration system?

Neil Gray: I agree fundamentally with the points that Brian Whittle raises about the need for that investment, though I gently point out to him that the investment that was announced by the chancellor is money that will arrive not this year but in years to come. I believe that we need that investment much earlier.

Of course, we will seek to collaborate, where it is possible, to ensure that there is effective communication between systems and, within Scotland, between GP services, acute settings and social care. That is exactly what the reform discussions that I am embarking on will be about trying to direct. With regard to where the capital comes from to invest in that work, I encourage Brian Whittle to encourage his colleagues to see to it that that investment is front-loaded, so that we can have it now.

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): The roll-out of e-health and digital technology is going at quite a slow pace. Recording of patient data still differs from one health board to another, which hinders progress, and some prescriptions are still being written by hand.

If we are to develop an e-health strategy that is fit for the future, we must see rapid advancement in the streamlining of recording practices across the country, and we must ensure that staff and patients alike are clear on what that progress looks like. Will the cabinet secretary outline in any future e-health strategies how we might address those concerns?

Neil Gray: I agree with the premise of Carol Mochan's question. She is absolutely right that, for us to have a productive health service that is responsive to patient need and that ensures that our clinicians are able to communicate effectively—between boards, where that is necessary, and between different settings, such as primary, acute and social care—cohesion and coherence are necessary.

We are already making investments, although I take the point that Carol Mochan makes about the pace of those. We want to go faster. We are looking with interest at the capital investment that is to come in future years from the UK Government, and we would want to see investment to come sooner. I will continue to collaborate with boards and colleagues on how we can make the digitisation of our health services a faster process.

NHS Lanarkshire (Recovery)

7. Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on NHS Lanarkshire's recovery plans. (S6O-03196)

The Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care (Neil Gray): NHS Lanarkshire, like all health boards, produces annually updated delivery plans that set out how it is addressing the challenges that are set out in our national health service recovery plan. Boards are currently in the process of developing their updated plans for 2024-25. Once NHS Lanarkshire's plans are finalised, they will be published via its website.

The plans will set out how the board continues to address significant on-going pressures as Covid backlogs, delayed discharge and Brexit-related staff shortages compound the pressures on its already stretched services. I offer my continued thanks to NHS Lanarkshire and its staff for their on-going and dedicated effort during these challenging times.

Monica Lennon: I also put my thanks to NHS Lanarkshire staff on the record. Can the cabinet secretary advise whether the downgrading of the neonatal intensive care unit at Wishaw will help or hinder NHS Lanarkshire's performance? In his assessment, will that plan be good or bad for the babies, children and families of Lanarkshire?

Neil Gray: To be clear, there is no downgrading of Wishaw general hospital's neonatal unit. The changes are about ensuring that we provide, in a safe way, the specialist services that certain sick babies need.

My colleague Jenni Minto visited Wishaw general hospital recently and was able to see the progress that is being made there. We will continue to engage with staff and patients to ensure that there is understanding of why it is necessary to take forward the changes, which are led by clinical advice and evidence. I will ensure that Monica Lennon has that advice sent to her, by either me or Ms Minto.

General Practitioners (Training and Recruitment)

8. Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide further details of the progress that it is making towards fulfilling its 2017 commitment to increase the number of GPs by 800 within a decade. (S6O-03197)

The Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care (Neil Gray): I remain fully committed to increasing the number of GPs in Scotland by 800 by 2027. I welcome the fact that the GP headcount has increased by 271 since 2017 and is now consistently over 5,000. Training new GPs is key to our approach. That takes time, but we have expanded GP specialty training, adding 35 places this academic year and a further 35 places next year. There are currently just over 1,200 trainee GPs in Scotland. We are also investing over £1 million each year in recruitment and retention initiatives, and I will set out my plans to further increase GP numbers in due course.

Sarah Boyack: When I met a constituent who works part time as a GP, I was concerned to hear his view that, because GPs are not given financial support to have trainee doctors working with them, GPs are potentially missing out. The situation means that trainee doctors do not see the fantastic contribution that GPs make to our health service. My constituent wanted me to highlight directly to the Scottish Government that lack of funding, which does not apply to hospitals. Will the cabinet secretary review the issue and consider whether providing funding could make a big impact?

Neil Gray: Sarah Boyack will be well aware of the financial pressures under which we are operating, but, in principle, yes, I am more than happy to look at that and to hear more from Sarah Boyack's constituent about how we can increase the resource that is going into primary care. Part of the reform consideration is about prevention and ensuring that people use primary care much more effectively. I would be happy to meet Sarah

Boyack and her constituent to hear about that directly.

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): GP shortages are particularly acute in Scotland's Highland, island and rural areas, and doctors are quitting. Some rural practices are now wholly staffed by temporary locum doctors. That is worsening health inequalities and depopulation in those areas. The shortfall of GPs has been described as critical by the British Medical Association, and it has called for special measures to be put in place to reverse the crisis. Golden hellos clearly are not enough to address the issues, and current schemes are also not delivering enough GPs.

We need urgent action to properly tackle the root problems of the failure to recruit and retain GPs. What urgent action is the Scottish Government taking to address the crisis in rural and island communities now?

Neil Gray: I have already set out in response to Sarah Boyack's question the work that we are doing to invest in recruitment and retention—that is worth £1 million a year—and to provide increased numbers of GPs in training. We currently have 1,200 GPs in training. I look forward to meeting the BMA and hearing more about its suggestions for how we can continue to facilitate recruitment and retention, but we will do so in a financially constrained environment in which decisions that have been taken for us have had an impact. For example, Brexit has had an impact on our workforce, and the fact that the resources coming from the UK Government are diminishing is having a clear impact on our ability to invest in the reform that we need.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): We know that training new GPs will play an important part in increasing the number of GPs in Scotland. Can the cabinet secretary provide an update on what further steps the Government is taking to support people to train, such as the unique ScotGEM—Scottish graduate entry medicine—programme, which has a focus on recruitment in rural areas?

Neil Gray: That is a good point from Emma Harper—she is absolutely right. Recruitment into general practice specialty training programmes in Scotland has improved drastically in recent years. For example, of all the GPST posts that were advertised in 2022, 99 per cent were filled successfully, which was up from 64 per cent in 2016. A 100 per cent fill rate has been achieved for the first time in Scotland this year, based on data that was published in July 2023. End-year results will be published shortly, and we will confirm the final position for 2023.

We are funding on-going expansion in GPST, with 35 additional posts having been created last year and another 35 being added this year. In addition to increasing training numbers, we recently committed to investing £1 million in targeted enhanced recruitment scheme bursaries for GP trainees who agree to undertake training in traditionally hard-to-fill areas, including in remote and rural parts of Scotland.

Sandesh Gulhane: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I apologise that I did not declare my interest as a practising national health service GP.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Dr Gulhane. That is duly noted. Obviously, the expectation is that any declaration of interest prefaces a member's contribution in the chamber, but thank you.

That concludes portfolio questions on NHS recovery, health and social care. There will be a short pause before we move on to the next item of business.

National Health Service Waiting Lists

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-12455, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on bringing down national health service waiting lists.

14:56

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I thank all staff who are employed in the NHS. We know that they work incredibly hard to care for us, but they are being let down by the Scottish National Party Government.

It has been two years and seven months since Humza Yousaf published the Scottish Government's NHS recovery plan. The First Minister at the time, Nicola Sturgeon, said:

"This plan will drive the recovery of our NHS—not just to its pre-pandemic level, but beyond."

That was in August 2021.

Since then, we have had a new First Minister—who is, of course, a former health secretary—and we are on to our third health secretary. They all committed to the recovery plan. They promised to build 10 national treatment centres to provide an additional 55,500 procedures per year by 2025-26. They promised to increase the number of diagnostic procedures by 78,000 in 2022-23. They promised to deliver 800 additional general practitioners by 2027 and to give every general practice access to a link worker.

The truth is that those promises have been broken. Only three national treatment centres are up and running, with the rest being delayed and over budget. The number of people on diagnostic waiting lists is up by 55,000 since 2020. Only 271 whole-time equivalent GPs have been hired in the past six years, and work has not even started on providing much-needed link workers in general practices.

Why is that important? Since the SNP promised Scots that it could fix the crisis in our NHS, the number of people on a waiting list has grown by almost 20 per cent, from 608,000 to 825,000. Let us picture the scale of that for a second—that is enough people to fill Murrayfield stadium not just twice or four times over, but 12 times over. Those are real people who are living in pain and discomfort, and with anxiety and uncertainty about when they will get the treatment that they need. The Scottish Government can spin it in any way that it wants—and we know that it will try—but the reality is that it has fundamentally failed people right across the country.

Here are some facts that might be uncomfortable for members on the Government benches. Ten years ago, just over 800 people on an in-patient waiting list still had not been seen after 12 weeks. In 2023, that figure was more than 101,000, which represents a 125-fold increase. That is not the only thing going up. Since 2013, the number of people on an out-patient waiting list has doubled; the number of people on an in-patient waiting list has more than doubled; the number of people waiting longer than the 31-day target for a cancer referral has more than tripled; there has been a seven-fold rise in the number of people waiting longer than the 62-day target for a cancer referral; and there has been a 27-fold rise in the number of people waiting for over 12 weeks for a referral for out-patient care.

Here are some more facts about accident and emergency departments. In 2023, more than 7,300 Scots waited more than a day in A and E, and a freedom of information request that we lodged revealed that patients waited in A and E for as long as 122 hours. That is almost five days waiting to be seen in accident and emergency.

In January this year, the number of people stranded in A and E for over eight hours soared to more than 17,800, and the number who waited for over half a day rose to more than 8,800. That is the highest number on record. In the same month, 57,860 days were spent in hospital by people whose discharge was delayed. That was higher than the number at the same point in 2023. The SNP promised to end delayed discharge way back in 2015.

The reason why that is serious is that the Royal College of Emergency Medicine has calculated that there will be an excess death for every one in 72 patients who spend between eight and 12 hours in an emergency department. Based on those figures, that equates to up to 2,000 excess deaths last year alone. That is heartbreaking because it is preventable.

Broken promises matter, because the failure to clear the waiting lists has real-life consequences. That is the legacy of the SNP Government. It has even broken its own statutory 12-week treatment time guarantee 680,000 times since it introduced it and 320,000 times before the pandemic itself. However, it still denies any responsibility.

What about the long waits? It was Humza Yousaf who promised to eradicate two-year waits by September 2022, I think. That date has come and gone, and we still have 7,170 Scots who have waited two years for treatment. That is 25 times more than the 282 patients who have been waiting that long in England. That is utterly shameful.

Please do not insult our intelligence by trotting out the same old excuses. Health is devolved. The

SNP has been in charge for 17 years. It must tell the people of Scotland—the people whom it has failed—what its plan is now. It must tell them what it will do to stop the delays to the new national treatment centres. They are delayed in Ayrshire and Arran, in Grampian, in Lanarkshire, in Lothian and in Tayside. It must tell them where the £300 million for waiting lists that was announced last year will come from, because it is not in the budget.

The SNP is out of time and out of ideas. When it comes to the NHS, the SNP's record is a blizzard of rhetoric to hide a litany of deadly failures.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to conclude.

Jackie Baillie: I move,

That the Parliament is concerned that almost 825,000 patients are stuck on NHS waiting lists for tests and treatment, whilst long waits have continued to rise, despite the current First Minister promising to eradicate them; is disappointed that the statutory 12-week Treatment Time Guarantee has been broken 680,000 times since it was introduced, and 320,000 times before the COVID-19 pandemic; notes that the Scottish Government's NHS Recovery Plan commitment to deliver 55,500 additional inpatient and day-case procedures by 2025-26 will not be met, in light of its decision to pause the National Treatment Centres programme, and calls on the Scottish Ministers to urgently tackle delayed discharge to increase capacity and publish a revised plan for bringing down waiting lists, including clarifying whether it still intends to reduce waiting lists by 100,000 patients by 2026, and to set out the source of the £300 million funding package that it announced in October 2023.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I advise members that there is no time in hand for the debate.

15:02

The Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care (Neil Gray): First of all, I will address one of Jackie Baillie's criticisms around responsibility. I absolutely accept responsibility. I apologise to anyone who has waited too long for treatment. We have been repeatedly clear that our NHS needs continual investment and reform to help with the recovery from the impact of the Covid pandemic and the pressures that were evident before the pandemic.

For most people, the NHS offers an incredible service that is delivered by dedicated professional staff in a timely manner. However, I accept that that is not the case for too many. That is the key driver behind the reform that we will be embarking on.

Our accident and emergency departments face pressures for two principal reasons: the demand that they face and the challenges of patient flow

through hospitals. We are working with health boards to address both challenges.

We know that Scotland is not unique, because services across the United Kingdom continue to experience similar challenges. On long waits in accident and emergency departments, the latest comparable 12-hour statistics for England in January show that 13.2 per cent of patients waited for 12 hours compared with 7.7 per cent in Scotland and 15.5 per cent in Wales. Planned care data for the last quarter of 2023 shows that, in Scotland, there were 124 patients per 1,000 population waiting for treatment time guarantee and new out-patient appointments. The measures that are used in England and Wales, which I accept are distinct from our measures, show that, in England, there were 134 patients per 1,000 population on the referral-to-treatment list while, in Wales, there were 244 per 1,000 population.

That is, of course, no comfort to those in Scotland who are waiting too long, but it serves to underline the shared challenges and pressures across the UK. In spite of some of the commentary—including some of what I expect we will hear today—those challenges in performance are not unique to Scotland.

There are signs of progress. Over 2023, new out-patient activity increased from the previous year, and the new out-patient list decreased for the first time since the end of 2021. To add to that, in-patient day-case activity for the last quarter of 2023 was the highest since the start of the pandemic.

We have seen a substantive reduction in new out-patient waits of over two years since the targets were announced, with the number waiting over two years for a new out-patient appointment down by 66 per cent from the end of June 2022. The number of waits of over two years for in-patient day-case treatment is also down by 25 per cent.

Cancer remains a priority. That is why we published our 10-year cancer strategy along with an initial three-year cancer action plan in June last year. To support cancer services with the highest waits, there is additional focus on urology, colorectal and breast cancer, and clearing diagnostic and treatment backlogs. We are also working to ensure that all capacity is maximised, including our network of robots, to support cancer patients in receiving timely access to surgery.

When it comes to investment and reform in our NHS, we are determined to go further. I will set out my thinking, including on the process of engagement, soon. However, we are trying to do that with one hand tied behind our back by the UK Government.

Last week, the chancellor had the opportunity to invest in public services such as the NHS and in needed public infrastructure; instead, he cut tax. In fact, the Tory chancellor delivered a real-terms cut to front-line health spending in England. Funding for NHS pay deals in England was not baselined, which means that the consequentials from health were a reduction on what was provided in 2023-24. The chancellor promised investment for improving productivity in the NHS, but not a single penny of that promised investment will be spent in 2024-25.

In short, the chancellor's budget brought yet more pain to the NHS to pay for tax cuts and put off the necessary investment in reform. It was the last desperate act of a Tory Government that is gliding towards the exit door with all the grace of a hippo on roller skates.

Sadly, the Labour election co-ordinator Pat McFadden MP confirmed last week that there were no specific policies in the Tory budget that Labour disagreed with. By backing the national insurance cuts from the Tories, Labour is backing that £1.7 billion that could have been spent on the NHS and infrastructure should now not come to Scotland.

Not content with that, it seems that Labour in Scotland has also decided to no longer back progressive taxation. By adopting the progressive model that we have in Scotland, we have made £1.5 billion available for services such as the NHS. It seems that Labour would abandon that. At the very least, if we follow the course that Anas Sarwar set out before his conference, it would reduce the income tax take in Scotland by over £560 million.

Jackie Baillie: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Neil Gray: I am sorry. Time is short, just as it was for Jackie Baillie's contribution. I apologise.

I suppose that the question for Labour is this: in forming the next UK Government or its policies here, what will it cut? It is not enough to promise that it will fund the NHS. It needs to put its money where its mouth is. It has to will the means as well as the end. We have not seen any evidence of that thus far. It has to be straight with the people of Scotland. If Labour is pursuing tax cuts, where will its cuts fall?

As for the Tory amendment, I suggest that Mr Gulhane might want to double check his figures.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to conclude.

Neil Gray: If he checks the Treasury country and regional analysis, he will find that, had front-line health spending in Scotland matched per head spending levels in England, it would have seen our

NHS get cumulatively around £15 billion less investment than it received under the SNP Government.

I am committed, and the Scottish Government is committed, to making the changes that are essential for facing on-going challenges and ensuring that we provide a sustainable future for our NHS.

I move amendment S6M-12455.2, to leave out from "is concerned" to end and insert:

"recognises the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on health service waiting times across the UK, and around the world; commends the dedicated NHS staff who work to provide the best care possible; believes that all long waits are regrettable and welcomes the progress in delivering a significant reduction for the longest waits; welcomes the opening of two National Treatment Centres within the last 12 months, with a further two centres opening in the coming months, which will provide capacity for an additional 20,000 procedures each year; notes that the Scottish Budget provides over £19.5 billion for health and social care, ensuring a real-terms uplift for the NHS in the face of UK Government austerity; acknowledges that, without the distinct and progressive approach to income tax in the Budget, the NHS and other public services would have £1.5 billion less funding; understands that the UK Government's decision to cut the Scottish Government's capital budget by £1.3 billion in real terms by 2027-28 has a direct impact on health infrastructure projects; believes that the £20 billion that the UK Government will lose as a result of its decision to cut national insurance should instead have been invested in NHS services and in infrastructure investment, and understands that the share of Barnett consequential funding that Scotland has lost as a result is around £1.6 billion, and believes that, in order to recover from the combined impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, Brexit and UK Government economic mismanagement, reform and innovation across the health service is required."

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We have no time in hand. I give due warning that I will cut speakers short at their allocated time.

15:08

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests as a practising NHS GP.

I also draw members' attention to the Scottish National Party Government's 2021 manifesto, in which it promised to deliver a new Monklands hospital, renew the east of Scotland cancer care centre and enhance primary care facilities throughout the country. Let us also not forget Humza Yousaf's so-called NHS recovery plan, one of the most underwhelming and poorly thought-out pamphlets in NHS history. It promised to boost in-patient and day-case activity through rolling out national treatment centres during this session of Parliament. However, instead of investing, the SNP has frozen all investments in new NHS projects over the next two years, at least. That means that at least a dozen facilities are on ice

across six health boards. Therefore, for people who live in the NHS Lothian, Ayrshire and Arran, Tayside, Lanarkshire, Highland or Grampian areas, it is not happening.

The SNP is big on words and woeful on delivery. Under Humza Yousaf's Government, one out-patient in 10 is now waiting nearly a year for an appointment, while one in-patient in 10 is waiting a year and a half. Fewer operations are taking place than before the pandemic. The cabinet secretary states that cancer is a priority, but only 65 per cent of patients who have been referred for colorectal cancer treatment received it within 62 days.

Of course, the SNP-Green Government blames anyone but itself, and that is because it does not take responsibility for its failings. Instead, it will cry that it is all Westminster's fault. I know that it does not like to hear this, but the Scottish Government decides how to spend its budget and what to prioritise. The fact is that, year in and year out, the SNP Government has chosen not to pass on the full Barnett consequential for healthcare from the UK Treasury to Scotland's NHS. That is some £17 billion of healthcare spending that the SNP has spent elsewhere on pet projects while waits for diagnostics and treatments grew.

Healthcare is devolved and Scotland needs solutions. The Conservatives agree with healthcare professionals who argue for a national conversation on our NHS. We are the first of Scotland's political parties to put pen to paper and develop a vision—a detailed, credible contribution to that conversation. We call for a modern, efficient and local approach to healthcare delivery. We would invest 12 per cent of the NHS budget into GP clinics to open new facilities, recruit more staff and make more appointments available, particularly in rural areas. We would introduce an online booking system.

We would also hold NHS management to account for its decisions. Unlike the SNP Government, which rewards executives in failing health boards, we would provide better conditions for front-line staff and reward them. We would also allow flexibility so that they can enjoy a better work-life balance, which is key to staff recruitment and retention.

We must be strategic and ditch SNP-style short-term solutions that buy a little time between health secretaries but result in devastating long-term consequences.

I move amendment S6M-12455.1, to insert after "programme":

“; recognises with deep concern that the Scottish Government has provided no guarantee of when new healthcare investment will resume; notes with alarm that one in 10 patients in Scotland are forced to wait more than

a year for a new outpatient appointment and more than a year and a half for an inpatient appointment; expresses further concern that, because of the increasing shortage of GPs, the true scale of the treatment backlog may be even higher, as patients find it increasingly difficult to access their GPs and obtain referral for diagnosis and treatment; condemns the consistent failure of the Scottish Government to pass on the full Barnett consequential funding for healthcare, cumulatively short-changing the NHS in Scotland by £17.6 billion; emphasises that long waits for treatment and diagnosis cause suffering and death”.

15:12

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): Again and again we come back to this topic but only, it seems, in Opposition time. The facts that are laid out in Jackie Baillie's motion make grim reading. Almost 825,000 patients in Scotland are languishing on NHS waiting lists for tests or treatment.

The Government is out of ideas for how to address the crisis. It seems content to make empty promises and then to do little to keep them. I refer to examples such as Humza Yousaf's failed promise to eradicate waiting lists, which only continue to rise, or the statutory 12-week treatment time guarantee, which has been broken 680,000 times since it was introduced. There is also the Government's promise in the NHS recovery plan to deliver more than 55,000 additional in-patient and day-case procedures by next year. The hard stop on the construction of national treatment centres means that that target will not be achieved. That, too, goes down as yet another broken promise by the half-hearted SNP-Green Government.

Unacceptable waits have become synonymous with Scotland's NHS. I also feel compelled to mention—on today of all days, as they gathered outside our Parliament—the 180,000 Scots whose lives have been shattered by long Covid. Many of them are long haulers and entering their fifth year of grappling with that terrible condition, but they are still forced to wait in vain for recognition, support and treatment pathways from the Government.

I have lost count of the number of times that we have had such debates in the chamber. I fear that the Government has become all too comfortable with crisis and is almost inured to it, but something has to give. It simply must. Every time we raise the state of the NHS in the chamber, ministers seek to blame the pandemic. When they do so, they insult the intelligence of us all and seriously test the patience of staff and people who seek care.

We all know that the issues in our NHS were there long before anyone had heard of Wuhan in China or Covid-19, and people are tired of hearing such excuses. Nowhere is that more true than

among NHS staff. The chair of the British Medical Association in Scotland said that NHS staff were “exhausted and facing burnout”. Staff and patients alike need new hope.

Our health service needs leadership and stability but, when it comes to the position of health secretary, it seems that there is no stability to be had—just a grim game of musical chairs. Neil Gray now needs to show the Parliament and the watching public that he is capable of innovative thinking and open to reform. When Humza Yousaf was in that position, he repeatedly ignored my party’s calls for a plan to address staff burn-out and to set up a health and social care staff assembly. The Government has shown pigheaded contempt for policies that would guarantee annual leave, ensure safe staffing levels and champion the expertise of those who know our health service best. We need to retain experienced staff if we are to bring down waiting lists.

Rather than making the meaningful investment that our health service needs, the Government is relying on short-term fixes to plug the gap. It is also failing to tackle the huge issue of delayed discharge, which is leaving people languishing in hospital wards when they should be at home. That causes an interruption in flow throughout the whole of the NHS, and it is manifest in emergency care delays. The Government is indulging its bureaucratic tendencies in the name of a vast, expensive and unwanted centralisation of social care.

I could go on, such is the litany of problems in our NHS under the present Government’s watch. People need to know that they can rely on a health service. They need to know that they will be tested, diagnosed and treated in a timely fashion, so that they have the best chance of recovery. The competent management of our health service is perhaps the primary thing that we elect a Scottish Government to do, but it is failing in that regard.

The health secretary needs to do three things.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to conclude, Mr Cole-Hamilton.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I will, so I will tell you about that the next time we come to this subject in Opposition time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you. We now move to the open debate.

15:16

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): Today’s debate is of critical importance, and it is right that we continue to use our time in the chamber to debate the topics that match the priorities of the Scottish people. Although the SNP

Government might want to hide from its responsibilities and its record when it comes to the NHS, we on the Labour benches have a responsibility to hold ministers to account on behalf of patients and staff who have been let down for too long.

The NHS is my party’s proudest achievement. It is our country’s most beloved asset, and it is an asset that belongs to everyone. When Bevan and Attlee established the NHS, it had the key founding principles of being free at the point of need, being a high-quality employer delivering first-class service and being an institution that would never discriminate when it came to the provision of healthcare. The founding principles of the NHS were important in 1948, and I argue that they are even more important in 2024.

The BMA Scotland chairman, Dr Iain Kennedy, has said:

“We have sleepwalked into our current situation ... We are now seeing the founding principle of the NHS, namely that it should be free at the point of need, threatened. This is the inevitable consequence of years of ducking the hard decisions”.

And yet it continues: in its amendment, the Scottish Government has managed to blame just about every factor other than its inability to meet the challenges facing the NHS today. Its self-congratulatory amendment will not be well received by the hundreds of thousands of Scots from across the country who are on needlessly long waiting lists. Let us be in no doubt that waiting lists are soaring, people are waiting in pain and our NHS is under extreme pressure.

The cabinet secretary knows that I am never fearful of calling out Tory austerity. In this instance, however, the Scottish Government is responsible for using devolved powers for the NHS. Because of serious mismanagement and, I think, broken promises, along with the arrogance of not accepting any responsibility, we are not in a good place for patients or staff here in Scotland’s NHS. The SNP wants to be in power, but it refuses to take responsibility. I think that patients and staff are tired of the endless excuses. Our NHS needs change, and there is a recognition that this tired Government is not up to delivering that change.

I accept that the cabinet secretary is only just in post, but, thanks to his predecessor, the challenge before him is significant. One in seven Scots is on an NHS waiting list, and that number is rising, despite, as we have heard, the First Minister’s commitment to eradicating that, and a treatment time guarantee, which, I will repeat, has been broken 680,000 times. No one underestimates the impact of the pandemic on our health services, and staff agree, but the reality is that, as is outlined in the Labour motion, the guarantee was

broken far too many times—320,000 times—before the Covid-19 pandemic.

It is fair to say that key commitments in the NHS recovery plan are not being met. Those issues are being exacerbated by the Scottish Government's decision to halt NHS capital projects, which are so desperately needed. Not only has the cabinet secretary let down my constituents in South Scotland, who will be waiting longer for the national treatment centre at Ayr, he cannot even get a hospital built in his own back yard. The impact of that decision will be longer and longer waits.

People must see the Government act. Under this Scottish Government, our tremendous NHS staff have been pushed to the limit. Services are at breaking point—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to conclude.

Carol Mochan: —and the Government must take action.

15:21

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): Waiting for an operation or treatment undoubtedly adds pressure and stress to what is an already stressful time—for some, intolerably so. I appreciate that waiting can exacerbate the problem for a patient who is waiting for treatment, and it brings additional issues such as stress and anxiety. I will never minimise that human impact.

The challenges that Scotland's NHS faces are not unique, and the significant impact of Covid-19 since 2019 on the normal operation of the NHS cannot be overestimated. In saying that, I am not pretending that everything was perfect prior to the pandemic; I am simply acknowledging the reality of where we are now and the scale of the challenge that we face.

Opposition parties should, of course, put whatever they want in their motions, but it will not be lost on folk that Labour has lodged a motion about NHS pressures and not included a single mention of the impact of the Covid pandemic. All MSPs receive regular contact from their local health boards, so we should all know the impact that it has had. There is no doubt that the pandemic has been the biggest shock that the NHS and health services in Europe and globally have faced. That shock is not unique to Scotland and cannot be ignored. It is clear that the pandemic has impacted on health services across the UK. Acknowledging the reality of where we are is important.

Sarah Boyack: The member rightly mentions Covid, but, as she may know, we have met people who have suffered from long Covid, and there is

no support for that coming from her SNP Government. What does she suggest to those people?

Ruth Maguire: I acknowledge the difficulty that people with long Covid face.

The cabinet secretary outlined a number of steps that the Scottish Government is taking. Ministers have published the national health and social care workforce strategy, which sets out a long-term vision for achieving a sustainable health and social care workforce. The fact that the Scottish Government values the NHS workforce and is committed to investing in it is demonstrable.

The Government has taken a number of steps, but we are short of time, so I will not go through them all. Scotland remains the only country in the UK to have successfully averted NHS strikes. I point that out not by way of self-congratulation but because actions on staffing will make the difference to the running of our NHS and how our citizens experience their care within it.

The recruitment and retention of staff, and the wellbeing of staff, are important to the sustainability of NHS Scotland's ability to provide efficient services amid the current challenges that it faces. We need to look closely at routes to a rewarding public service career in the NHS and reflect on when previous decisions might have had unintended consequences. For example, where surgeons now specialise at the beginning of their careers, there is a lack of general surgical consultants. That is causing some challenge in my health board area.

In relation to allied health professionals and nursing, we could consider more apprenticeships and earn-as-you-learn and work-type programmes, which could provide progression and development opportunities for existing health and social care staff. That would also be attractive to adults who wish for a career change but for whom four years at university is not an option.

I welcome the minister's comments on those issues. I know that some work is on-going, but it feels like we need to pick up the pace on this, as it could be beneficial for individual citizens and the healthcare system as a whole.

15:24

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I thank the Labour Party for holding this debate on health issues. We seem to discuss such matters only during Opposition time, which is a disgrace. It is also a disgrace that the cabinet secretary wants to amend the motion to put a lot of the blame on Covid.

Let me give some of the facts. Prior to Covid, the orthopaedic waiting list in NHS Highland had

well in excess of 2,000 people on it, the ophthalmic list was so long that we were flying people up from south of the border to do operations at weekends, and treatment times were appalling. On top of that, we had an unappreciated staff workforce and bullying was rampant. We ended up having to pay £2.8 million in compensation to the people who were bullied. There were high sickness rates and a huge number of vacancies—especially in the radiology department. Those are the facts, and those things happened before Covid.

Now, post-Covid, we have orthopaedic waiting lists that—as judged by a university the other day—could extend waits to seven years. The people on those lists cannot be treated in the national treatment centre because they are too sick; their orthopaedic operations require too much care for them to go into the national treatment centre.

Let us look at audiology. In Inverness, the news about waiting lists is not so bad. There is a 28-week wait to get an appointment, and, when a person gets their appointment, they then have to wait for 49 weeks to get a hearing aid. However, the situation is substantially worse if the person is in Wick, as they have to wait 31 weeks for an appointment and 64 weeks for a hearing aid. From start to finish, that is nearly two years to get a hearing aid—but people can pop down to Boots and get one in three weeks. That is a disgrace, and it is not acceptable.

I applaud the Government for saying what it has said about the national treatment centre. It was late and over budget, and, although it is working for our orthopaedic patients, it is doing so only for a certain number of them—those who are less ill and can be treated overnight. We have ophthalmic theatres in the national treatment centre that are not being used. Why are they not being used? It is because it has not managed to recruit the surgeons who are needed to do the surgery. We can build as many centres as we like, but, if we cannot get the staff to work there, the centres are no help.

I will now talk about neurological development assessment waiting lists, which I find deeply disturbing. I have tried to find out how many people are on the waiting list for neurological development assessments in the NHS Highland area. Doing so is not easy, because the information is held partly by the Highland Council and partly by NHS Highland. The latest figures that I got showed that there were 800 children waiting for neurological development assessments on the NHS Highland waiting list and a further 600 children waiting on the Highland Council waiting list to get on to the NHS Highland waiting list. That means that there are approximately 1,400 children

waiting to get a neurological development assessment. That is unacceptable, especially as I was told that the person at the bottom of the list will have to wait 15 years to get a neurological development assessment. That means that they will finish school before they get the help that they need.

I also point out briefly—as I know that my time is running out—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You do not have time, Mr Mountain.

Edward Mountain: It appears that, in NHS Highland, a waiting list is not a waiting list; it is a waiting list to get on a waiting list.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We have to move on.

15:29

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): I start by commending the work of our incredible NHS staff across Scotland. I hope that we can all agree that they have been doing remarkable work, given the challenges that they face. However, their already challenging work is being made significantly harder by the neglect that has been inflicted on the NHS by the Scottish National Party Government.

Although the NHS is struggling across all of Scotland, I highlight the pressures that services in Lothian face. Our hospitals are already under huge pressure there, and waiting times for vital operations are increasing. Those pressures will continue as our population grows, as 84 per cent of Scotland's future population growth will be in Lothian, so its NHS services urgently need investment.

Nowhere is that clearer than in the case of the Edinburgh eye pavilion. The building was declared unfit for purpose in 2014—that is a decade of unsuitable facilities for people who need vital, life-changing services such as eye surgery. How did the SNP Government respond? With yet more broken promises and, ultimately, by freezing capital spending on the desperately needed new eye hospital, along with other national treatment centres that are urgently needed across Scotland.

It is an issue not just for Lothian residents. A quarter of people with sight loss in Scotland are having to rely on facilities that are not fit for purpose, with zero reassurance and nothing in the way of timescales from the Scottish Government to give them any confidence that things are going to change.

The end result for patients is that life becomes significantly harder and treatment often becomes inaccessible. People experiencing sight loss are often more restricted in their transport options, yet

they are being made to travel to Clydebank or even to Newcastle, at personal cost, if they want to receive NHS treatment for their eye condition. That is not acceptable, because every patient on that waiting list is a real person with a real experience, not a statistic.

We spoke to a constituent who was facing a 17-month wait for treatment. She simply could not wait that long, as her sight was deteriorating. When she wrote to my office, she was about to take on significant debt just to pay for simple but life-changing treatment in the private sector, because she could not wait for that NHS treatment. That is unacceptable. It is an unthinkable choice—going into debt or losing your sight—and it is a choice that she never should have faced. It is a direct result of the failed promises of the SNP Government, which continues to let down patients across Scotland and, as Carol Mochan highlighted, is undermining the key principles of our NHS. Such stories are commonplace, and I am sure that members across the chamber have similar tales to tell.

In Lothian, waiting times have trebled over the past nine years and the number of people waiting more than 16 weeks has increased from 156 to more than 9,000 patients. As Jackie Baillie and Carol Mochan highlighted, the pressures that our NHS faces have been created and compounded by the lack of support offered by the SNP Government. It is not enough just to blame the UK Government—that is a refusal to take responsibility for the problems on our doorstep over the past 17 years. It is not just the eye pavilion that is not happening, but the national treatment centre in Livingston and our urgently needed new cancer centre in Edinburgh.

The SNP Government needs to act now to bring down waiting list times, to ensure that everyone in Scotland gets the treatment that they need, when they need it. Waiting time delays are not “regrettable”, they are utterly unacceptable, and our constituents deserve better.

15:33

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I remind members that I am a registered nurse, former clinical educator and perioperative clinical practitioner.

Of course, it is important to reduce NHS waiting times, but I want to highlight the example of how we work in the perioperative environment in theatre. It is a complex environment that requires specialist surgical teams—consultants, surgeons, anaesthetists, nurses and perioperative support workers—as well as ancillary co-ordination with labs, blood banks and radiology. Everyone requires knowledge, skills, competency and

training, and everyone who works in those areas and across the NHS must be commended for their commitment to providing the best care for their patients.

Tackling waiting times is no easy feat. The Scottish Government is choosing to invest more than £19.5 billion in health and social care in 2024-25, giving our NHS a real-terms uplift, despite UK Government austerity. That includes £14.2 billion of investment in our NHS boards, with additional investment of over half a billion pounds—and it is worth noting that NHS Dumfries and Galloway and NHS Borders, in my South Scotland region, are receiving a real-terms uplift in funding, too.

Of course, that does not come without its challenges. It is worth noting that the current budget, passed by the Parliament, will do more for our NHS. It will provide an additional £230 million to support delivery of the pay uplift to a minimum of £12 per hour for adult social care workers in the third and private sectors from April 2024, representing a 10.1 per cent increase for all eligible workers. It will invest more than £2.1 billion in primary care to improve preventative care in the community, supporting the development of multidisciplinary teams in general practice, sustaining NHS dental care through enhanced fees and continuing free eye examinations. It will also support spend in excess of £1.3 billion for mental health services, for which there is an ever-increasing demand. Those are welcome commitments, given the current strain on all budgets due to economic mismanagement from Westminster.

However, despite that investment, the system is under extreme pressure as a result of the on-going impact of pandemic recovery, Brexit, inflation and UK Government spending decisions. I welcome the fact that the Scottish Government will continue to target resources in order to reduce waiting times, particularly for those who are waiting the longest for treatment, through maximising productivity and additional resources.

Investing in Scotland's NHS is non-negotiable for the Scottish Government. Against what is a challenging economic and financial context, the Scottish Government is taking the difficult and necessary decisions to ensure continued investment in health and social care services. The UK spring budget was nothing short of a betrayal of public services across the UK. It provided less in Barnett consequential for health than in-year health consequential for 2023-24, and it failed to deliver more capital funding for infrastructure. Based on the latest forecasts, Scotland's capital block grant is now expected to reduce in real terms by £1.3 billion by 2027-28.

I know that my time is short, Presiding Officer, but I was interested to hear Carol Mochan say that she was proud of her party that created the NHS. I wonder whether she is proud of Labour's shadow Secretary of State for Health and Social Care saying that he would

"hold the door wide open"

to the NHS for the private sector if his party wins the next general election. Our NHS has major challenges, with lots of things to consider, but the threat to Scotland's NHS comes from Westminster parties of all colours.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to conclude, Ms Harper.

Emma Harper: Those threats will be damaging for Scotland. However, if we had independence, we would be able to manage much better.

15:37

Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con): I start by thanking all staff who work throughout the NHS.

The debate is on an issue that MSPs probably hear about the most from our constituents. Whatever constituency MSPs represent, the dire and depressing problems in our NHS are having a terrible impact on people across Scotland. Our NHS has been in a constant state of crisis for many years under the SNP, and that sorry situation is getting worse, not better.

I will briefly reiterate some of the shocking statistics that others have highlighted in the debate, in the hope that the Government will finally take notice. More than 820,000 people are on NHS waiting lists in Scotland; January 2024 was the worst month on record for long A and E waits; and one in 10 patients are waiting nearly a year for appointments. It was hard to imagine those statistics getting any worse—then Humza Yousaf introduced his recovery plan and, somehow, it did get worse. His recovery plan did not improve treatment times; instead, it let them spiral further. He made big bold promises when he launched that plan, but almost none of them has been delivered.

That is the really damning thing about the SNP's handling of our health service. It is bad enough that it presides over repeated failures, but it is a real slap in the face to patients that it keeps making promises that it does not keep. It promised to increase the number of GPs by 800 by 2027, but, so far, GP numbers have decreased by 26. In rural areas, getting an in-person GP appointment can now be a nightmare. The SNP also promised to end delayed discharge and free up hospital beds, but the problem is as bad as ever and is costing Scotland's NHS a fortune.

Today, I want to focus on one particular broken promise to people in Ayrshire: the promise to deliver a national treatment centre at Carrick Glen. The centre has been delayed for years, and, judging by the SNP's track record, who knows whether it will ever happen. A network of national treatment centres across the country was originally an SNP election pledge not this year, nor in 2022, 2021, 2019, 2017 or even 2016—a national network was promised way back in 2015. At the time, the SNP's then First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said:

"If we don't act to prepare now for 10 and 20 years ahead, our NHS will be overwhelmed by the demand."

Well, she got one thing right. Nearly 10 years on, the NHS is now "overwhelmed by ... demand", because the SNP did not act.

Humza Yousaf doubled down on Nicola Sturgeon's grand promises before the 2022 election, when he came to Ayr for a photo op to announce the Carrick Glen centre. On that day, he said:

"the network of National Treatment Centres will ... be central to NHS recovery."

Just like his photo ops with the doomed ferries, that one was clearly all for show. He later added that

"The National Treatment Centre ... Programme will deliver the single biggest increase in protected planned care capacity ever created in NHS Scotland."—[*Written Answers*, 12 May 2022; S6W-08250.]

However, that

"single biggest increase in ... care"

has turned into the single biggest let-down for patients across Ayrshire. Local people are seeing waiting times for treatment rise; they are seeing intensive care unit beds moved away from Ayr hospital to Crosshouse, because the former cannot recruit staff; and they are seeing long waits for a GP appointment. As it is an election year, however, there is no doubt that they will soon, once again, be seeing Humza Yousaf, in a pair of scrubs, making another big promise that he will not deliver.

The problem for the SNP is that local people also see right through that charade. They deserve a lot better than another batch of soon-to-be-broken promises.

15:41

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): We can always rely on Labour to put up a motion complaining about the management of the NHS, full of negativity, with not one word of encouragement to the thousands of staff who are working extremely hard day in, day out to deliver

healthcare and keep us all safe. The SNP amendment commends those staff, and I am happy to put on record my thanks to the NHS staff whom I know personally, and to the entire workforce, who are still working under the most difficult times that they have faced in a generation.

The Labour motion is little more than numbers and criticisms, but there is another story to tell. I will share a few facts and figures from Ayrshire and Arran that might help balance out Labour's narrative a bit. First, though, I offer a gentle reminder that it was our Labour friends who planned to shut the accident and emergency unit at Ayr hospital, and it was the incoming SNP Government that kept it open, much to the delight of the 55,000 or so people in Ayrshire who signed the petition and the many thousands who have continued to benefit since. That decision has never been welcomed by Labour, from that day to this. How dare the SNP reverse Labour's closure plans for Ayr hospital and save the unit, and save lives as a result?

Covid has not disappeared, and its impact will ripple on for some time yet. Those are not my words, but the words of our excellent chief executive of NHS Ayrshire and Arran, Claire Burden, who is working tirelessly to get us through these times. Last year, more than 1.25 million GP consultations were carried out in Ayrshire and Arran; those are real people, who are getting a fantastic service from their dedicated GPs. We have satisfied 465,000 out-patient appointments; that is a huge demand that is being met, with a range of NHS staff working to achieve that. We have also satisfied more than 100,000 out-of-hours appointments through our Ayrshire urgent care service.

Our emergency departments, including the one at Ayr, dealt with more than 93,000 life-or-death situations, saving lives every day. Currently in Ayrshire and Arran, the situation is as difficult as it is anywhere else, but, according to our chief exec, the pause in the national treatment centres has not affected service provision there. In the meantime, we have managed to benefit from the recruitment of additional staff down there, as well as an orthopaedic surgeon. We have more capacity than in previous years.

At Ayr hospital, we now have a dedicated station for orthopaedic surgery, and that team has some of the highest levels of productivity and highest performance figures Scotland-wide. Waiting times for out-patients are increasing—there is no doubt about that—because demand is currently outstripping Ayrshire's ability to get through the backlog. Recruitment is on-going, however, thanks to the additional budget support that the SNP Government has provided.

As for other performance achievements, the numbers of in-patient day cases continue to fall. Performance in relation to the 31-day cancer treatment target also continues to meet the 95 per cent level—and last November, it was actually 100 per cent. Compliance with the endoscopy target has also improved to its highest level since 2020. Finally, compliance with the child and adult mental health services target also reached 100 per cent in November last year, exceeding the target by 10 percentage points.

I therefore say a huge well done to Ayrshire and Arran NHS staff. We will not hear any of that good news from Labour, but members will hear it from me and the thousands of patients who get high-quality care and life-saving treatment daily in Ayrshire and Arran.

Finally, I note a request from NHS Ayrshire and Arran for the public to engage more directly with the legal processes in order to establish power of attorney for their family members, as that will help all health boards improve the delayed discharge situation. More than half of the delayed discharge cases in Ayrshire and Arran that involve loss of capacity are caused by that issue alone, not by performance or lack of community care provision. The worst figures for that problem are in Tory-run South Ayrshire. Who knows—maybe even Labour will welcome that news, and our resident Tory GPs who are in the chamber might be aware of it, too.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to conclude, Mr Coffey.

Willie Coffey: I support the Government's amendment and ask the Parliament to reject the relentlessly negative Labour motion and Tory amendment.

15:46

Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con): Audit Scotland hit the nail on the head when it said:

"There has been no unified vision"

for the NHS since 2013 under the SNP Government. A decade later, patients and front-line staff are paying the price for the SNP's mismanagement of the NHS. Only the SNP-Green Government could make the national treatment centres the linchpin of its NHS recovery plan and then yank their funding. You could not make it up. National treatment centres in NHS Lothian, NHS Ayrshire and Arran, NHS Lanarkshire, NHS Tayside and NHS Grampian, in my region, have all been left in limbo.

Meanwhile, as we have heard today, patients who are in chronic pain have been left to languish on waiting lists for months and even years. MSPs' inboxes are full of heart-wrenching accounts of

people who are desperate for treatment. Earlier this week, a constituent contacted me after being referred for a gastroenterology appointment by her GP. The NHS Inform website said the current wait to be seen was six weeks. After speaking to staff, she was told it would be 42 weeks. That is a different la-la land from the la-la land that Mr Coffey spoke about. She said she came off the phone lost for words.

Sharon Dowey talked about the SNP's broken promise to people in Ayrshire who have been waiting for years for a national treatment centre at Carrick Glen. She highlighted that the SNP knew nine years ago what would happen if the NHS's capacity was not increased there, but the centre has not been delivered. The SNP has dithered and delayed.

Ruth Maguire today blamed Covid, but Edward Mountain raised serious concerns about NHS Highland before Covid.

The SNP might try to blame everyone but itself for those failures, and the SNP amendment certainly takes a crack at that. The SNP-Green Government has full control over the NHS in Scotland. As the Scottish Conservative amendment emphasises and Dr Sandesh Gulhane highlighted, it has full control over investment in healthcare and how it spends that budget. The cabinet secretary might shake his head, but that is the truth. Dr Gulhane was right to say that, year in and year out, the SNP Government has chosen not to pass on the full Barnett consequential from the UK Treasury to Scotland's NHS.

We should take note that the SNP Government is responsible for the decisions that it makes, and that it seems to enjoy the trappings of power but not the responsibility. Today, however, Neil Gray, as the new SNP Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care, publicly accepted responsibility, which is rich, coming after 17 years of the inertia and inaction of successive health secretaries. Nicola Sturgeon, Shona Robison, Jeane Freeman, Humza Yousaf and Michael Matheson have left our NHS in a desperately sorry state. Despite the heroic efforts of NHS staff on the front line, there are record waits for treatment, record waits to be seen in A and E, massive increases in private operations and major blockages in ambulance turnaround times.

The SNP Government is out of ideas and out of time. It must adopt the Scottish Conservatives' plans for a modern, efficient and local NHS to secure the future of our healthcare system and to save lives.

15:50

The Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport (Maree Todd): First and foremost, I thank those who are at the heart of our NHS for their commitment, hard work and dedication to providing the best care possible to the people of Scotland.

I will focus much of my response on mental health, which is in my portfolio. We remain committed to our priorities: driving down waiting times and improving mental health. We have seen a sustained improvement in our child and adolescent mental health services waiting times, which gives us good grounds for optimism. The CAMHS system performance has recovered to better than pre-pandemic levels, and we can take our learning from that and apply it to other areas.

We must recognise where we see improvement. National performance against the 18-week CAMHS standard in the most recent quarter is the fourth highest since records began, and the highest achieved since the quarter ending March 2016.

Jackie Baillie: Will the minister take an intervention?

Maree Todd: I have very little time.

The past two years—2022 and 2023—showed the highest number on record of people starting treatment from CAMHS, and one in two people referred to CAMHS now starts treatment within six weeks, which is down from 10 weeks in the previous quarter. That has been made possible by the hard work of our CAMHS workforce, which has more than doubled under this Government, and by improvements that have been supported by direct investment from the Scottish Government—first through the recovery and renewal fund, from which £40 million was allocated to implement the CAMHS service specification, and then through the outcomes framework, which amounted to £55.5 million in 2023-24 for improvements to mental health services, including CAMHS.

Through additional investment, we have been setting the conditions needed for long-term, sustainable improvement to the CAMHS system. It has taken time for our investment to be reflected in national waiting times performance, as boards worked hard to clear their backlogs. However, we are now seeing evidence of significant and sustained progress, including high levels of activity in CAMHS and significant improvements in waiting lists.

We have provided, and will continue to provide, enhanced support to those boards where waits are the longest. That enhanced support package will focus on the delivery of the national CAMHS specification and local improvement plans and

trajectories to meet the standard, and on the plan to clear backlogs.

Edward Mountain: Will the minister take an intervention?

Maree Todd: I am afraid that I have very little time.

The issue of delayed discharge, which also sits in my portfolio, is a challenging one. We know that the delays in receiving the most appropriate care in the right environment can be detrimental to a person's physical and mental health. We know that delayed discharges also have significant consequences for the normal flow of patients through hospitals. How do we rise to face that challenge? It is helpful that, in Scotland, we have more beds per head of population and more health professional staff, and that those staff are better paid. Hospital at home is another response; the older people's service is now similar to a hospital the size of University hospital Wishaw.

Although it is absolutely true that the level of delayed discharge in Scotland is unacceptable, and we take responsibility for that, it is very clear that the problem is not unique to Scotland. It is difficult to make comparisons between UK nations, but the numbers speak for themselves. In Scotland, 22 adults per 100,000 are delayed in acute hospitals; in Tory-run England, that number is 31 adults per 100,000, which is much higher. In Scotland, the total number of delayed discharges is 42 per 100,000; in Labour-run Wales, that number is—wait for it—62 per 100,000.

A number of members made some excellent suggestions. Ruth Maguire's suggestion on considering alternative training pathways for health professionals was very welcome, and the nursing and midwifery task force is already considering that.

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

Maree Todd: The challenges and opportunities that we face need action. Our NHS is our most cherished public service, and we must work together to deliver the changes that we need in order to deliver the sustainable and high-quality services that the people of Scotland deserve.

15:54

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): Labour has used its Opposition day today to raise the critical issue of waiting times in our national health service, which is an issue that every one of us has a stake in. Our communities, family members, relatives, colleagues and friends are at risk as a result of the NHS not performing to the best that it can. This Parliament must take cognisance of that,

because it is the single most important area of public policy that it deals with.

The facts are stark and incontrovertible. Despite the Government's attempts to erase those facts in its amendment to Labour's motion, they remain. Currently, almost 825,000 patients are on NHS waiting lists for tests and treatment. That is more than the combined population of Glasgow and Dundee, and it is simply unsustainable and unacceptable. It creates huge national pressure, and it means that we have a sicker population and a vicious cycle that affects every area of public life.

Long waits have continued to rise, despite the First Minister's promise to eradicate them entirely. We are not seeing an effort to get ahead of the problem at a sufficient rate. Indeed, the 12-week treatment time guarantee has been broken 680,000 times since it was introduced. That is the equivalent of more than the entire population of Glasgow alone. In addition, the Government's commitment to delivering 55,500 additional procedures has not been met.

The minister mentioned in her closing remarks that areas of improvement include CAMHS waiting lists. I am afraid that that is a bit of a mirage. I investigated what was going on in Glasgow and discovered that the only reason that the waiting lists have been going down is that face-to-face consultations have been substituted for telephone consultations. That is simply not good enough, and it is not good enough for the minister to come to the chamber and misrepresent what is going on in our CAMHS system in that way.

As I said, it is our families and friends who are languishing on those waiting lists, awaiting care that they desperately need while their health and overall outcomes worsen. Those are the people who email us daily and come to our constituency advice surgeries in desperate situations, eager to get support. It is not good enough for the Government to simply deny their lived experience and their reality. It is our duty as parliamentarians to give voice to their frustrations and difficulties.

The Scottish Government talks about waiting well but, unfortunately, people are dying while waiting. We have heard numerous examples of the terrible situations that are taking place. Indeed, 18,390 patients died in 2022 while stuck on an NHS waiting list, and there has been a 39 per cent rise in deaths since before the pandemic in 2019. It simply is not good enough for the Government to use the pandemic as an excuse. The member for Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley ought to listen more to his constituents in that regard, instead of patronising them in the way that he did in his speech.

Ms Boyack, one of the members for the Lothian region, highlighted our excellent NHS clinicians,

but they are being betrayed, too. They are not just working in obsolete facilities such as the Princess Alexandra eye pavilion in Edinburgh. Oncologists who came to the Parliament in the past few weeks told us in devastating terms that they are watching cancer patients go from being treatable at the point of diagnosis to being terminally ill—indeed, I have met those patients personally in Glasgow’s hospices. That is a betrayal. An extrajudicial death sentence is being visited on the people of Scotland in some instances. That is the reality of what is going on.

Taking responsibility does not simply mean saying that there is a problem; it means dealing with it and addressing it. We all have a stake in the matter.

Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Does the member also accept that taking responsibility means not committing ourselves to Tory spending plans for two years?

Paul Sweeney: That characterisation is simply not true. The fiscal rules that Labour is setting are about improving economic growth by applying discipline to public spending. Here is a good example. The Scottish Government sits here impotently denying that it can invest in national treatment centres because of capital spending constraints while wasting £1.2 billion on delayed discharge. That is incompetence. Saying that there is no ability to undertake capital investment simply does not stand up to scrutiny.

We must address the vicious cycle. I urge the Government ministers to stop thinking like accountants and start thinking like economists, like the Audit Scotland reports have urged it to do. This is all about connecting up a whole system. Mr Mountain, one of the members for the Highlands and Islands region, highlighted the example of hearing aids, which might seem more benign. However, that speaks to back-door privatisation, because the current situation basically means that people cannot get hearing aids—and they cannot access dental treatment or get eye tests either. Those who can, pay, and those who cannot, languish, suffer and cannot go to work or function as citizens. We get a sicker population and a less economically productive society.

The Government must address that vicious cycle. It simply cannot just point at what is happening in other parts of the UK. It should take responsibility and address those issues, as we as parliamentarians in Scotland should be doing here.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on bringing down NHS waiting lists. There will be a brief pause before we move to the next item of business.

Scotland’s Economy

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-12457, in the name of Daniel Johnson, on growing Scotland’s economy. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons. I advise members that there is, as ever, very little time in hand.

16:01

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): This debate does not need to be an argument. The Government could choose to be constructive, to look at the issues that we face and to talk in serious terms about the powers that it has around skills, planning and regulation and about the infrastructure on which our economy relies. Alternatively, it could choose to look the other way or, worse, stick its head in the sand. I urge it to do the former, because we need to focus on productivity.

We should be worried, not just about the technical recession that we appear to be in now but, more important, about the seven consecutive quarters of decline of gross domestic product per capita at United Kingdom level. Worse still, the evidence suggests that Scotland is, if anything, underperforming compared with the UK economy rather than being held back by it. That is what appears to be indicated in the recent report by the Confederation of British Industry and the Fraser of Allander Institute, which shows that Scotland lags the UK on 10 of the 13 measures that it sets out.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I share much of Mr Johnson’s analysis of the report by the CBI and the Fraser of Allander Institute on productivity. However, will he clarify Labour’s current stance on income tax differentials? Does Labour believe that income tax in Scotland should be made equivalent to income tax in the rest of the UK, or does it have a different position?

Daniel Johnson: I thank Murdo Fraser for asking me an easy question. We have to look very carefully at the cost of income tax differentials and the impact that they have. That is not the same as saying that we could move immediately to do something about them, but we need to pay very close attention to them. There are indications and evidence that the income tax differentials are now hurting our ability to attract talent to Scotland.

The second point that I highlight from the CBI and Fraser of Allander Institute report is that the proportion of businesses that are “innovation-active” is 6 per cent lower in Scotland than the UK average. On health, 31 per cent of those who are

economically inactive are on long-term sick, compared with just 24 per cent in England.

The report is not an isolated report. The Ernst & Young regional economic growth forecast projects that the growth of gross value added in Scotland, as well as our employment growth, will be slower than that of every other nation and region of the UK.

The Scottish Government, with its significant powers to deliver economic growth, is more concerned with pointing out what it cannot do than with focusing on what it can do. A year on from its so-called “reset” with business, many businesses that I speak to feel that their relationship with Government is stuck, rather than reset. We hear about new strategies time and time again, and goals are discussed, but there is really very little in terms of delivery or implementation.

We are now two years on from the launch of the Scottish Government’s 10-year national strategy for economic transformation, but what has been achieved? Audit Scotland has already highlighted the “gap in political leadership”, with crucial governance structures not even being established. Indeed, Ivan McKee, who was involved with the strategy, said in a recent column that the Government is chasing “Good headlines” at the expense of economic policy implementation. He is right.

We desperately need a plan, a laser-like focus on delivery and a Government approach that seeks to—

Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP): Does Mr Johnson agree that it would be deleterious to the economy in Scotland if Labour further increased the windfall tax from 75 per cent to 78 per cent and, perhaps even more damagingly, removed the reliefs that currently exist? In the short term, there might be slightly more revenue but, in the long term, in the 2030s, there would be nothing at all, because that would just starve future investment.

Daniel Johnson: I understand the member’s concern, but, in the end, we have a choice: do we seek to tax the profits of energy companies or increase tax on hard-working Scots? I know what I would choose every single time.

In our recently published paper “Building a business case for Scotland”, we set out three principles: working in partnership with business, having a plan so that business and Government understand their respective roles, and using the convening power of Government. The Government must recognise its responsibility to bring parties together proactively. What we see from the Government is a failure to take the issue seriously, use the powers that it has and set the priorities that it needs to set.

For example, there is a serious risk that the Berwick Bank wind farm project, which would potentially give Scotland one of the largest offshore wind farms in the world, will be held back. The site still does not have the Scottish Government consent that it needs, and it needs it by 16 April in order to take part in the contracts for difference allocation round 6, which will happen just next month. The decision has been on ministers’ desks for 15 months. That uncertainty undermines investment and harms supply, so let us have decisions made in a timely manner. We need the Government to understand its responsibility and the role that it plays in economic development.

Similarly, on Grangemouth, we see a lack of proactive steps. The cessation of refining at Scotland’s only refinery, which is a key strategic asset, will cost workers their livelihoods and devastate the local community. The key to that is a hydrocracker. For the sake of a £12 million investment, the site could be profitable enough for it to continue. I ask again: what will it take? Will the Scottish Government pull out the stops? Has it held a meeting to assemble agencies such as the Scottish National Investment Bank and Scottish Enterprise with the owners and other potential investors? Will it use its convening power to see what can be done, and will it pull out all the stops to get that investment, or will it simply talk about economic factors and just transition but do little to deliver that?

Under this Government, it feels as if we are drifting towards a lost decade of low growth, with high taxes and declining public services. We desperately need a Government that is willing to harness the economic potential of Scotland and its people; a Government that is willing not just to set goals but to do the hard yards to deliver the actions to realise those goals. Scotland needs change, and Scottish Labour stands ready to deliver it.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises the crucial role that economic growth plays in delivering strong public services and social change; believes that, despite this, the Scottish Government has failed to use the powers that it has to grow Scotland’s economy and has instead presided over low growth and low productivity; notes the publication of the CBI-Fraser of Allander Institute *Scottish Productivity Index 2024*, which shows that Scotland is lagging behind the rest of the UK on 10 out of 13 productivity indicators; believes that this underperformance has serious implications for living standards and incomes and will place further pressure on Scotland’s struggling public services; calls on the Scottish Government to take a new approach to the economy, working in partnership with business to unleash the true economic potential of Scotland and its people, and notes the publication of the Scottish Labour Party’s *Building a Business Case for Scotland* and its proposals to use the soft power of Brand Scotland to increase exports and international investment, to simplify Scotland’s enterprise

agency landscape so that it is better aligned to deliver innovation, promote growth and attract investment, to embed technology across the economy and in Scottish public services to support excellence and ensure future generations are tech and business ready, and to develop a clear skills plan with transition pathways into the green economy.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I gently remind members who are looking to participate in the debate and who have not already pressed their request-to-speak button to do so now.

I call Màiri McAllan to speak to and move amendment S6M-12457.2.

16:07

The Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Net Zero and Energy (Màiri McAllan): I welcome the timing of Daniel Johnson's debate. In his motion, he suggests that Scotland is somehow lagging behind the rest of the UK. Of course, he does so while the UK is in a recession, technical or otherwise, and when Scotland is not. In doing that, I fear that he has somewhat undermined his own arguments.

In moving the amendment in my name, I want to use the time that I have to set the record straight. I will do so with reference to two key points. The first is that Scotland's economy performs well in the UK, but the second is that the UK economic model has ultimately failed, and that has been compounded by the pursuit of a disastrous Brexit. Further, while Scotland remains part of that failed system, we will compare poorly with our European comparators.

On current performance, Scotland is the top-performing region outside London and the south-east, with the third-highest wages and gross value added per person in 2021. Since the Scottish National Party came into government in 2007, GDP per person has grown by 10.8 per cent in Scotland, compared with 5.6 per cent at UK level. Also since 2007, productivity has grown at an annual rate of 1 per cent, compared with the UK's 0.5 per cent. On inward investment, in 2022, we outperformed the UK and the European Union average, with growth of 3.3 per cent in Scotland, compared with 1.4 per cent in the EU, and a 6.4 per cent fall across the UK. This week, a key survey showed that private sector employment in Scotland has grown faster than in any other UK nation. It is important to note all that.

At the same time, more workers earn the real living wage in Scotland than elsewhere in the UK, and a near-record number of workers are in payrolled employment. Likewise, the gender pay gap and child poverty rates are lower compared with those in the UK. All of that demonstrates that Scotland's economy is one of the best performing in the UK and that the Scottish National Party

Government has determinedly pursued fairness alongside economic growth.

Daniel Johnson: Does the cabinet secretary recognise that we need to look at those figures in the round? The employment and wage growth has come after there was slower growth as we came out of the pandemic. Does she recognise that, on 10 of the 13 measures that are set out in the CBI and Fraser of Allander Institute report, Scotland is behind the rest of the UK?

Màiri McAllan: I welcome the CBI report and the work that I am able to do with the organisation. We do need to take things in the round, and I want to talk about the context, because what I have set out has been achieved in the face of headwinds that have characterised my whole adult life, as they have for so many people around Scotland. Chief among them are the 15 years of corrosive austerity—which have resulted in the relentless underfunding of our public services and have punished the most vulnerable in our society—and, of course, the hard Brexit that was pursued against the democratic will of Scotland in the middle of a pandemic.

On Brexit, research now shows that the UK economy is 2.5 per cent smaller than it would have been if we had still been in the European Union, and the Office for Budget Responsibility says that it expects the UK's potential GDP to fall by 4 per cent in the long run because of Brexit. Appallingly, despite the overwhelming evidence that Brexit is damaging our economy and should be reversed, neither the Tories nor Labour support a return to the EU.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Màiri McAllan: I am afraid that I do not have time.

Over the past few months, we have seen the parties that are vying for Downing Street emulate each another. We have seen that in relation to Brexit, and we have seen it in Labour's approach to caps. In its view, capping is now appropriate for child benefit, but not for bankers' bonuses.

I will use the time that I have left to talk about what there is still to do. Daniel Johnson is absolutely right that we cannot be complacent. We are working to deliver our vision for Scotland's fair, green and growing economy. We are doing that in a number of ways, including through our blueprint for entrepreneurial campuses, investment in our national Techscaler network and the launch of the National Manufacturing Institute Scotland. We are progressing Ana Stewart's recommendations on support for women in business, we have strengthened conditionality through our fair work first policy, and we are increasing funding for the green investment portfolio by £1 billion. I have had

the chance to see that for myself. For example, I recently visited Grangemouth in relation to Piramal Pharma's £45 million investment in its antibody drug conjugates manufacturing facility, and I welcomed Sumitomo's £350 million inward investment in Cromarty. These are hugely exciting times, and the Government is seizing the opportunities that are before us.

However, it is well documented that the combination of the flexibility of independence and access to the European market provided the key components for the success of our prosperous Irish neighbours. It is therefore clear that only as an independent country can we truly realise what this Government has long pursued under devolution—namely, the true economic potential of this country, side by side with the health, wellbeing and happiness of all who live here.

I move amendment S6M-12457.2, to leave out from “recognises” to end and insert:

“notes that, since 2007, Scotland's GDP per capita has grown 10.8% in comparison to the UK's growth of 5.6%; acknowledges that, over the same time period, productivity has increased at an annual average rate of 1% a year in Scotland compared with the UK's 0.5% a year; welcomes the approach taken to the economy by the Scottish Government to build a collaborative relationship with business, industry, workers and trades unions and to create jobs through the development of a green industrial strategy; considers that, in Scotland, a near record high number of people are in payrolled employment and a higher proportion of workers earn the real Living Wage than in the other UK nations, while the gender pay gap and child poverty rates are lower also than the UK's; recognises that the UK economic model has failed to deliver the prosperity to Scotland that is enjoyed by neighbouring countries; further recognises that the Office for Budget Responsibility forecasts that the UK economy will be 4% smaller as a result of Brexit, a Brexit which is supported by three of the four largest parties in the UK Parliament, and agrees that the best way for Scotland to develop a wellbeing economy, and so match the economic success of Scotland's northern European neighbours, is to become an independent EU member state.”

16:13

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

Before I come to the substance of the debate, I gently remind the cabinet secretary that Ireland's economic growth was based on slashing taxes in order to attract investment, which is the opposite of what the Scottish Government is doing with its devolved budget.

I welcome this debate on growth, which was well timed by the Labour Party on the very day that we learned that the UK economy grew by 0.2 per cent in January and is climbing out of recession. Despite the international headwinds that are affecting all major western economies, the UK economy has grown faster than any other major European economy since 2010, and it is

expected to grow faster than the economies of many of our competitor nations.

Daniel Johnson: Does Murdo Fraser acknowledge that growth of 0.2 per cent is hardly an economic surge and that, more importantly, if we look at the same GDP figures on a per capita basis, we see that the UK's performance is well within the bottom third, if not the bottom quarter, of the performances of countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development?

Murdo Fraser: Mr Johnson needs to look at what is happening in, for example, Germany, which has been in persistent recession. The UK economy is performing better than many of the benchmarks against which we could judge it.

Growth is important. We need growth in order to provide secure, well-paid jobs and to generate the tax revenues that our public services depend on.

I agree with a lot of Daniel Johnson's analysis. The CBI-Fraser of Allander Institute Scottish productivity index that he referred to has stark messages about us lagging behind the rest of the UK on a range of measures.

Stephen Leckie, who is the president of the Scottish Chambers of Commerce and has just been elevated to the chair of VisitScotland, which is a very worthy appointment in which I think he will excel, has said:

“Scotland's economic growth is stuck in a low growth cycle.”

He is correct because, since 2014—over the past decade—Scotland's growth has, on average, been one half of the rate of the UK. Had it grown at even the UK average over 10 years, we would have had an extra £6 billion to £7 billion in tax revenues to spend on vital public services.

In her amendment and in her speech, the cabinet secretary referred to numbers going back to 2007. She is right: in the period 2007 to 2014, relatively speaking, the Scottish economy grew faster. Why? That was because of the growth in oil and gas. That is the very sector of the economy that the SNP Government wants to see closed down—as, indeed, does the Labour Party. Therefore, we should not take too much comfort from that. The position since 2014 has not been encouraging.

The whole question of the tax differential is mentioned in our amendment, because it is very important to the debate.

Fergus Ewing: Will the member give way?

Murdo Fraser: I will if Fergus Ewing is very brief.

Fergus Ewing: Given Murdo Fraser's remarks about the windfall tax, does he regret the decision

by the chancellor to extend the windfall tax to 2029?

Murdo Fraser: Yes, and we have made that very clear, but we still have a better offer to support oil and gas than any other party in the chamber.

Sandy Begbie, the chief executive of Scottish Financial Enterprise, was quoted last month as saying that

“Scotland is becoming a dangerous place to be rich or create wealth.”

When a senior business figure comes out with that warning, we should listen to it.

It would be good to know exactly where Labour stands on that. I heard Mr Johnson’s response to my intervention. He hinted that Labour is moving towards a position of perhaps lowering income tax in Scotland. That would be a serious departure from what we have heard from his Labour colleagues over many years in the chamber. They have persistently called for higher taxes on higher earners to fund public services. If that is a change in Labour’s direction, that is very welcome, but we need to get that clarified.

The new deal for business promised much and was much welcomed by the business sector in Scotland, which is now sadly disappointed, because all that the Scottish Government’s budget delivered was tax hikes, with no passing on of business rates cuts, but cuts to enterprise, trade, employability, skills, colleges and universities. That is why the business community in Scotland is looking for a lot more from the Government.

I commend to the Government our paper “Grasping the Thistle: Our plan for economic growth”. That is covered in my amendment to the motion, which I have pleasure in moving.

I move amendment S6M-12457.1, to leave out from “, and notes” to end and insert:

“; recognises that ill health and long-term economic inactivity within Scotland are barriers to delivering growth, and calls on the Scottish Government to address these issues and deliver greater investment in education to provide long-term economic growth; notes that the income tax differential between Scotland and the rest of the UK is damaging business and is an obstacle to economic growth; further notes that this tax differential will become more pronounced with the introduction of the new “Advanced” tax band in the new financial year; calls on the Scottish Government to take steps to make income tax competitive with the rest of the UK to unleash Scotland’s economic potential, and further calls on the Scottish Government to look to the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party’s policy paper, *Grasping the Thistle – Our plan for economic growth*, for inspiration on how to grow Scotland’s economy through its proposals for making the delivery of strong, long-term growth the main economic priority of government, creating a joint Scottish economic board to bring together ministers from the Scottish and UK governments, delivering a national workforce plan, building regional clusters of

excellence to deliver Scottish exporting success, and supporting key investments to create a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship.”

16:17

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): There has been a lot of talk about context this afternoon. We should remember that the past 10 years have enveloped this country in chaos, from the independence referendum, which had a direct impact on the business community and our economy, to Brexit, Boris Johnson, the pandemic and the infamous Liz Truss budget. It has been a decade of political uncertainty, and the economy has been undermined.

However, the Scottish policy context is important, too. The Scottish Government’s industrial strategy has been based on spending hundreds of millions of pounds on projects with very little return. Let us take the example of Burntisland Fabrications: £50 million was spent for nothing in return for the Fife and the Western Isles economies. The taxation policy has been incredibly volatile. It has gone from proposed hikes in income tax to enforcing a freeze of the council tax to hikes again in income tax. It is very difficult to read where the Scottish Government is going. It claims progressivity in its approach, but it never gives any indication of when that ends.

On regulation, the legislation has been heavy handed. Sometimes it has been done with good intentions, but it has been heavy handed, overcooked and implemented in a cack-handed fashion. The effect is that the Scottish economy continues to be sluggish, with productivity in a terrible state. The Scottish economy lags behind that of the UK, which, in itself, lags behind the economies of our competitors in the rest of the world.

Fergus Ewing: Will the member take an intervention?

Willie Rennie: No. I am sorry.

Scotland has lagged behind the UK for a long time on business research and development. The Scottish Government has made no difference to business R and D, and GDP growth has been incredibly weak. That feeds through to the public funds that are available for public services.

The country needs change at Westminster but also at Holyrood. It needs an end to the chaos and a focus on practical steps to grow the economy.

There are some real opportunities that we must maximise. After the far-too-large ScotWind leasing round was sold on the cheap, the Scottish Government now has an enormous task to support the creation of the enormous supply chain that is required to exploit the potential and build the

expert staffing capacity in Marine Scotland to grant the various permissions that are required.

Currently, it can take up to 10 years to get a wind farm into operation. That is far too long. If there is a bottleneck on licensing and the supply chain is not developed here, the work and the investment could go elsewhere, along with our much-sought-after energy security and our climate change obligations. The stakes are incredibly high.

Our universities are a major source of economic growth, especially through the talent that they produce and the excellent research that they conduct. That research feeds through to spin-outs, licensing, jobs and growth. We can see that in our communities. However, because of the lack of support and investment, Scottish universities are attracting an ever smaller proportion of UK research funding. The funding continues to decline, and the opportunity is slipping away from us. We need to ensure that we invest in our universities to keep that excellence.

We also need to have a stable United Kingdom with Scotland as part of it for the finance sector. We saw during the independence referendum debate how vulnerable that sector was to the threat of independence. We must therefore have an end to the endless production of independence papers, which are causing a huge distraction.

We are short of skilled workers following Brexit. We need to have an immigration policy that works for our economy.

The short-term licensing scheme is overcooked and overdone. The regulation measures need to be smart and fit for purpose.

Finally, we need to have some certainty about taxation. I do not know where the Government is going on taxation. I think that many people are worried about where it is going.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): You must conclude, Mr Rennie.

Willie Rennie: The progressive argument continues forever. We need certainty in order to get investment in our country.

16:22

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Education and skills are key if we are to have a high-wage and high-skill economy that works for the people of Scotland. Right now, we have a skills gap across much of the Scottish economy, our schools are struggling with increasing pressures, and our colleges are limping along from crisis to crisis, with staff morale reported as being at rock bottom.

A survey report on employers by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development in 2022

suggested a negative perception of schools by employers across Scotland. The report stated that some of the most concerning findings were around the gaps in literacy and numeracy in the workplace, which are linked to school education and which are worse in Scotland than in England. The survey also showed that 22 per cent of employers used further education colleges to deliver training and that 52 per cent did not offer any apprenticeships at all.

It is crucial that the Government focus on education and address the issues in our schools and colleges. In January, the Minister for Higher and Further Education; and Minister for Veterans told the chamber:

“There is a long-term issue with industrial relations in the college sector.”

He went on to say that he was

“intrigued by the fact that, although all sides recognise that, we have not yet been able to find a solution.”—[*Official Report*, 18 January 2024; c 4.]

Colleges are key to skilling up the workforce of the future and, indeed, reskilling the workforce of today. It is simply not good enough that the Government stands back and watches as colleges bounce from one crisis to the next. The Government must take the necessary actions to ensure that our colleges can deliver for our economy and the people of Scotland. There should be no more excuses. We need action, and we need it now.

I made the point in a debate last week that my concern is that the Government is so consumed by its singular focus on independence as the only answer to the difficulties that we face in Scotland that our current place in the world is diminished. That is purely because the SNP refuses to believe that we have the ability to build a better country with the powers that we have. A case in point is the speech in January in which the First Minister made the case for an industrial strategy for Scotland after independence. It is ludicrous to suggest that independence is needed to deliver an industrial strategy for Scotland. An industrial strategy can be put in place right now in the UK.

As Our Scottish Future’s paper “From Growth to Good: a ten-year growth plan for Scotland”, which was published in December, states, we believe that we are lacking a more collaborative, simplified and focused joined-up plan from our UK and Scottish Governments. The paper goes on to state:

“On the economy, our diagnosis is clear: we believe government in Scotland is doing too many things on too small a scale in too many unconnected silos. Our prescription is for the Scottish and UK Governments to come together to agree a new industrial strategy for Scotland, backing our key growth sectors and places to drive up productivity and growth for all.”

To be clear, we need the Scottish Government and the UK Government to come together, work together and work with industry and trade unions to develop an industrial strategy for Scotland that will deliver the growth and prosperity that Scotland requires.

16:26

Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP): I apologise in advance, but, with only four minutes for my speech, I probably will not take any interventions.

I confess that I read Labour's document "Building a business case for Scotland"—I have a copy in front of me—with interest, because I was looking for ideas and we can always learn from others. It runs to about 30 pages, 10 of which are photographs. Many of them are of Anas Sarwar and Keir Starmer staring wistfully into the middle distance. I do not quite know what they are contemplating. To be honest, the document is pretty thin gruel. I will come to some of the specifics as I go through my speech.

First, the document references Scotland's economic performance. I am always one of the first to highlight areas for improvement, as members across the chamber know. We can always do better but, as the cabinet secretary clearly outlined, we have lower unemployment in Scotland than in the rest of the UK, had faster wage growth in Scotland than in the rest of the UK last year and have the best foreign direct investment performance outside London. Our onshore exports are growing at twice the rate of those in the rest of the UK post-Brexit and we have fewer workers below the real living wage and had higher GDP per capita growth over the past period and higher productivity growth per capita than in the rest of the UK.

We are better than the UK on many economic indicators, but that is a fairly low aspiration. We need to do better with the full powers of independence. That performance did not happen by accident. A coherent set of strategies sits behind it, including the national strategy for economic transformation, the innovation strategy and our digital, FDI, export and other strategies. Of course, we can do better on delivery, but the actions that need to be delivered are clear.

What does Labour's document say about the specifics? It calls for a simplification of the agency landscape. Labour members might want to have a conversation with Highlands and Islands Enterprise or South of Scotland Enterprise if they have those agencies in their sights. Economic performance in the Highlands and south of Scotland has gone much better than previously as a consequence of those agencies being in place.

The document then tops it all by further complicating the landscape in calling for the establishment of a council for economic growth, so it is not even coherent within itself.

The document calls for investment in ports. I do not know whether that is part of Labour's promised £28 billion commitment to green investment—I am sorry; there is no longer that commitment, so I do not know where the port investment will come from. It also talks about ensuring that Scotland has a voice in the UK immigration system and pushing for EU visa waivers. If Labour was opposed to Brexit in the way that we are, we might get more traction in both those areas.

The document talks about exports and promoting brand Scotland by working with partners including the diaspora. Perhaps Labour has never heard of the GlobalScot programme, which is going from strength to strength, and the export strategy that is driving the export growth, which is faster in Scotland than in the rest of the UK post-Brexit, as I mentioned.

I am interested in getting Labour's view on Scotland's international footprint—the Scottish Development International and Scottish Government offices. The Tories are always keen to criticise that, and I would like to get Labour's perspective in the closing remarks.

The document talks about developing a simple gateway for FDI. We already have that. It is called Scottish Development International and it is delivering on the success of Scotland performing best of all parts of the UK outside of London on foreign direct investment.

On technology, the document talks about supporting the sector to grow, digitising small and medium-sized enterprises and rolling out digitisation in the public sector. All those themes are covered in the Scottish Government's digitisation strategy, which was developed jointly and powerfully with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities.

As a result of work that has been done by Scottish Enterprise and the Scottish Government over recent years, the Scottish financial technology cluster is one of the leading fintech clusters anywhere in Europe. Labour's paper does pay tribute to one Scottish Government strategy—the Logan review, which the Government commissioned from the chief entrepreneur. The document discusses that review's importance, so I give Labour credit for recognising the value of some Scottish Government work.

Labour's document throws in a comment about "learning from Silicon Valley", and I would like to get the Labour Party's perspective on the visit to silicon valley by the Minister for Small Business, Innovation, Tourism and Trade, Mr Lochhead, to

learn from people there, as Labour identified that he should do. All that we heard from Opposition members about that visit was criticism of the minister's taxi fare, rather than understanding of what we have to learn from others internationally. That was a ridiculous piece of nonsense.

The Presiding Officer: You must conclude, Mr McKee.

Ivan McKee: I could go on and on, but I will make one brief conclusion. The tourism sector calling for a new tourism strategy will be news to the Scottish Tourism Alliance, which is working very thoroughly to "Scotland Outlook 2030", Scotland's national tourism strategy, which was put in place by my good friend, Mr Fergus Ewing.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr McKee. You must conclude at that point.

16:30

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I have to say that I felt a spark and a growing sense of excitement when I heard that the Labour Party was going to split its time today between health and growing the economy. Finally, I thought, the penny is beginning to drop—Labour is starting to recognise that we need to tackle Scotland's poor health record if we are going to fully realise Scotland's economic potential and recognise that our consistently poor and declining health report card is the biggest drag on our economy. But no—that spark was quickly extinguished when I read both Labour's motions. It seems that Labour is still to make the connection across portfolios about practically tackling the major issues that Scotland faces today.

Waiting times, delayed discharge and poor health outcomes in the preventable space—such as drug and alcohol deaths and addictions, obesity, type 2 diabetes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, heart disease, 40 per cent of cancers and so on—have led to a high level of economic inactivity in Scotland's population. In the previous parliamentary session, the Health and Sport Committee determined that preventable health issues were costing the Scottish economy more than £30 billion, and I suggest that the figure has continued to rise significantly since then. As we see time and again in all portfolios, the problem is that the SNP is capable only of firefighting the problems that it has created, rather than developing long-term solutions.

In 17 years, so much could have been achieved in the preventable space, with the major levers of health and education fully at the Scottish Government's disposal. However, according to just about every measure, the SNP has managed to create worse outcomes for the Scottish people. I was therefore encouraged last week by the

announcement of £3 billion in the chancellor's budget for health tech and information technology, especially for communication and collaboration. That is one of the most significant interventions that there has been, which will lay the foundation for more efficient health outcomes.

That brings me to education, which is the cornerstone of every portfolio—especially health and the economy. The educational environment can have such a huge implication for long-term health outcomes, which in turn delivers a boost to our economic development—not to mention positively impacting on welfare and justice.

I was with an electrical engineering company on Monday, and its representatives were telling me that the company could not grow at the rate that it should and could because it could not recruit enough apprentices, which is directly related to a lack of career guidance in schools. A salary for a qualified electrical engineer is in the region of £45,000 or upwards. However, as is the case with many of the opportunities that should be available to our students in the green and renewables space, that message and those opportunities are not filtering down to students. Colleges have the skill and the capacity, but it has not been realised that the situation is leading companies to import skills rather than train Scottish students.

In this short debate I have only scratched the surface of what I would like to say. However, if we are in agreement that we need to grow Scotland's economy and if we are to invest in our public services properly, we have to be prepared to say where we will get that growth from. I would advocate that investing in education is investing in health. I would advocate that investing in education is investing in the welfare and justice systems, and it is a key driver in tackling poverty and inequality.

Finally, for all the reasons that have been stated already, investing in education is investing in our economy. If we tackle education and health, both of which have been completely devolved to the Scottish Government for 17 years, the economy will benefit. That is about cross-portfolio working, which is not the Government's strong point.

16:34

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): If publishing plans, agreeing strategies or setting up advisory councils delivered economic growth, Scotland's economy would be booming. According to Our Scottish Future, we have had 60 plans on the economy and more than 80 on climate change in the past decade, but Scotland's economy continues to lag behind the rest of the UK's on 10 out of 13 productivity indicators, from business investment to research and development spend.

For the Scottish Government, it is about being seen to be doing something but not actually doing it. Areas that already have weaker economic indicators, such as rural areas or those that are further from the central belt, often feel the impact of a Government for which strategies have become a substitute for actions.

In areas such as Dumfries and Galloway and the Borders, the outward migration of young people is suffocating growth; there are fewer people with higher skill levels than elsewhere in Scotland; GVA is consistently below the Scottish average; poor digital connectivity is a barrier to new and existing businesses; a lack of affordable housing is limiting the retention of young people and the attraction of new talent; and poor and declining public transport is undermining access to services, jobs and education. The failure to invest in key transport infrastructure such as the A75 and the A77 holds back not just the region's economy but Scotland's economy. Low pay is endemic in the region—pay is as much as £100 a week lower than in the rest of Scotland. Limited access to workspace and business support means that we are simply not fulfilling the huge potential and immense economic talent of the south of Scotland.

However, rather than take the action that is needed to revitalise and rejuvenate the region, ministers continue to take decisions that will hold it back. Let us take colleges, which are a key driver of economic growth. In the south of Scotland, there is a limited higher education offer and no stand-alone universities, so further education pathways are crucial. The brutal 13 per cent cut in the Skills Development Scotland contract at Dumfries and Galloway College in this financial year means a reduction in apprenticeship places in key sectors such as construction. Every week, local businesses that are desperate to recruit and upskill their workforce tell me about their acute labour and skills shortages.

Borders College recently wrote to me, warning of the blow to Borders businesses of the withdrawal of the flexible workforce development fund, which hundreds have used to reskill and upskill their workers. As a result of the cash cut of 4.7 per cent for next year, both of the colleges in the region have told me that they are working through scenarios in which the curriculum offer, the number of courses and the number of students in their colleges will be reduced. That is the economics of the madhouse.

It is not just colleges that are bearing the disproportionate brunt of the cuts. I campaigned for a decade for a south of Scotland enterprise agency. I welcomed the establishment of that agency, and, indeed, I sat on the committee that oversaw the legislation that established it. Ivan McKee talked about its importance, but the

staggering 22 per cent planned cut in its budget will mean less support for businesses in the region, when there needs to be more support.

Ivan McKee: I wonder whether Colin Smyth has the same concerns as I have about Labour's plans to rationalise and simplify the agency landscape, because that can mean only one thing.

Colin Smyth: It cannot mean only one thing—it can mean several things. Most important, it can mean an end to the silo working that often exists in those agencies. We have a raft of agencies and they need to work more closely together to give businesses the one-stop shop that Ivan McKee failed to deliver when he was a minister and that the Government has failed to deliver for 16 years.

In the past 16 years, the Government has failed to use the powers that it has to grow Scotland's economy, never mind tackling the geographical inequalities cross the country. It has presided over low growth and low productivity. We need change. There is no question but that we need to simplify our enterprise agencies and give businesses that one-stop shop. We need to recognise that our colleges are the key driver of tackling our skills shortages and not continue to cut their funding, particularly when higher education opportunities are limited.

We need to learn from the Government's shocking past mistakes. In the drive to net zero, we must ensure that the growth in renewables is matched by a growth in jobs in Scottish businesses and Scottish—

The Presiding Officer: You must conclude, Mr Smyth.

Colin Smyth: —not offshored in a way that the Government offshores the profits.

We need to unleash the true economic potential of Scotland and our people, and that involves every part of Scotland.

16:39

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): I welcome Labour's acknowledgement of how well the country performs in its report, "Building a business case for Scotland", which states:

"Scotland has been an internationalist, outward looking nation that has punched well above its weight across the UK and on the world stage."

That is a recognition of what the SNP has achieved during the past 17 years, despite a financial crash, Brexit and a pandemic.

Thanks to the latest figures from the House of Commons library, we can detail how we have punched well above our weight. Gross domestic product per head, which is a broad measure of

economic growth, is higher in Scotland than in Northern Ireland, the north-east of England, the north-west, Yorkshire, the midlands, the east and the south-west of England. Before I forget, in Wales—which is Labour controlled—GDP per head is 17 per cent lower than it is in Scotland. The employment rate in Scotland is higher than the employment rate in Labour-controlled Wales and in Northern Ireland, and it is higher or on a par with the rate in many English regions. Scotland also has the highest median weekly earnings of any UK nation, and they are higher than in the UK. In Labour-controlled Wales, the median weekly earnings for a full-time employee are 10 per cent lower than they are in the UK.

Since Labour's financial crash of 2008, productivity in Scotland has increased by an average of 1 per cent per year. Not only is that higher than the UK increase of 0.5 per cent per year, but it is higher than the increase in the OECD countries and it is higher than the EU27 average increase.

Analysis from the London School of Economics highlights that productivity is lower in the UK than in France, Germany and America. That gap is due to a lack of investment in capital and skills. On skills, Scotland has the highest percentage of its working-age population with higher education certificates, at 50 per cent, which surpasses the UK figure of 31 per cent.

A report on productivity from the LSE's programme on innovation and diffusion says that,

"from a growth perspective, cuts to public capital investment in future years are particularly concerning."

The report goes on to say:

"The UK productivity problem can be summed up in three words—investment, investment and investment. Or lack thereof."

However, the Tory spring budget delivered no additional capital funding for Scotland. Indeed, the block grant for capital is expected to reduce in real terms, with a cumulative loss of more than £1.3 billion by 2027-28.

Scotland is also the only UK nation with a consistent international trade surplus in goods since records began. That is only one example of where Scotland is outperforming the UK and being held back by Westminster.

Electricity exports to the rest of the UK have an estimated value of £4 billion on the wholesale market. Yesterday, the boss of Octopus Energy said that switching to zonal pricing would give Scotland some of the

"cheapest electricity in Europe"

and that it

"would help attract businesses to Scotland".

There is also currently an opportunity to attract high-energy-use companies such as data centres to Scotland, as there is a 10-year moratorium on building them in parts of London. However, electricity policy is reserved and, as a result, we do not benefit from our abundance of electricity generation.

Scotland's record of attracting foreign direct investment outpaces that of both the UK and Europe for the number of projects and it maintains Scotland's position as the top-performing area of the UK outside London for the eighth year.

Brexit has made it more difficult to trade with an EU marketplace of almost 450 million people, which we need better access to if we are serious about growing Scotland's economy. However, Labour, the Tories and the Lib Dems have all declared themselves as Brexiteers, and only independence will give us the opportunity to rejoin the EU.

16:43

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands)

(Green): I am pleased to have the opportunity to say a few words in the debate on behalf of the Scottish Greens. It is quite clear to us that, when considering the economy, we need to ask and answer questions about what our economy is actually for. As the Scottish Government's amendment highlights, on conventional measures of economic success, Scotland is doing pretty well compared with the rest of the UK. However, the amendment also acknowledges that Brexit has done untold damage not only to our economy but to the people—the workers and human beings who create value in the economy—that our economy is supposed to support.

The Scottish Greens want our economy to serve all of society and to create a context in which all of us can reach our potential. Such an economy must be based on care, creativity and co-operation, not just driven by the quest for profit. We all know that GDP is a very poor, blunt measure of quality of life. It masks the inequalities we see across Scotland and, indeed, across the UK: inequality of employment, education and income, and unequal access to basic necessities such as housing, health and social care.

Those inequalities are caused by uneven development, unequal economic activity and unequal access to the economy. That is why the Scottish Greens have long championed a radical transformation of our economy. We need to create a genuine wellbeing economy—not just the buzz phrase that it is in danger of becoming. Such an economy would be built on sustainable development and social equity, supporting long-term liveability for people and planet. We know

that we cannot have healthy, happy communities in polluted and devastated environments. Our economy must prioritise sustaining and regenerating our natural resources, reducing emissions and protecting our life support systems. It should support regenerative agriculture and food production that enhances our natural world. It must make circularity and fair resource use the default, and it should promote green infrastructure, including public spaces and liveable neighbourhoods.

We cannot have social equity when our economy relies on the unequal distribution of wealth. To change that, we need to make our economy inclusive and democratic. We must take predistributive as well as redistributive approaches. We must decentralise decision making; promote employee ownership through social enterprises, co-operatives and other employee-owned business models; empower communities and broaden community benefit; and make ethical, socially and environmentally responsible practices the norm.

Scotland can be a leader in such an economy—an economy that recognises global challenges and supports co-operation across national boundaries. I trust that the green industrial strategy will be a useful tool to help us along the path. We should consider more than just energy as part of our green economy. Caring and creative jobs, for example, are often very well aligned to green, wellbeing economy objectives. However, it is essential that we have a strategy and that we do not leave economic transformation to the whims of the market or Westminster.

In closing, I want to address one final issue. Scottish Labour has stated that the Scottish Parliament has been too focused on social policy over economic policy. That is a bit rich coming from the party of devolution, which designed this institution without including powers over many of the economic levers that we would wish to have. However, that statement also points to a fundamental problem. Instead of seeing economic and social policy as separate entities, we must realise that economic, social and environmental justice are all inextricably linked, and that is why we must transform our economy.

16:48

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I am pleased to be able to speak in today's debate. A strong, growing economy is vital for jobs, for sustainable communities and for successful, well-funded public services. I doubt that anyone here, bar perhaps the anti-growth Greens, would disagree with that.

Others have spoken about the importance of economic growth more generally. I will focus on my region, the Highlands and Islands, and, more widely, on rural communities. One of the key areas identified in the Scottish Conservatives' "Grasping the Thistle" policy paper is infrastructure—or, as is too often the case, lack of infrastructure. Parts of my region still suffer from extremely slow, limited or entirely non-existent broadband coverage. That clearly presents real challenges for those who are looking to start or grow businesses in those areas and for those who want to freelance or just work remotely. Also, despite the endless promises of improvement, the transport infrastructure of the region is extremely limited. The A9 remains undualled, and now the A96 will not be dualled. Other major routes across the region are either in need of serious improvement or riddled with potholes.

Our ferries fleet is getting older and increasingly unreliable, and the SNP's failure to act not only impacts on those islands and their businesses and economies but risks the very future of some. However, it is not just our islands that are impacted. Over the summer, I visited Ardnamurchan and spoke with local businesses and residents who were impacted by the disruption of the ferry service across the Corran Narrows. One boat was out of service entirely, and the other—its nearly 50-year-old back-up—was either providing a limited service or was broken down. They were angry and frustrated because visitor footfall was down at a vital time of year and they see administrations in Edinburgh and Inverness offering no real hope of a resolution any time soon. Some of the people I spoke to were concerned about people, local families and local businesses moving out of the area entirely.

If we want vibrant communities and successful, growing local economies, we need people to live in those areas. Depopulation remains a real challenge in my region, and it has been far from helped by the running down and centralising of so many local services. On Saturday, I will be in Fort William to join local people who are campaigning for a new Belford hospital. The hospital is urgently needed, and local people have been waiting for it for almost 20 years, but it is now on pause because of the Scottish Government's latest budget.

Scottish ministers do not seem that interested in the Highlands and Islands or in rural Scotland. The latest SNP-Green budget saw tens of millions of pounds of spending cuts to our rural affairs and islands budgets and included serious cuts to the budgets of Highlands and Islands Enterprise and South of Scotland Enterprise. Ministers have left councils with full responsibility for funding Business Gateway when local authorities are already cutting back on services because of years

of squeezed funding from Edinburgh. How can the Scottish Government claim to be serious about boosting economic growth when it cuts millions of pounds in funding from the enterprise bodies that have been tasked with supporting businesses in large parts of rural Scotland, which should be some of the key drivers of economic growth?

Of course, the SNP is not really interested in debating economic growth. As its amendment makes clear, it is just another chance to pump some hot air into its deflating independence cause. It claims, as it always does, that independence is the answer to Scotland's woes—woes that come after 17 years of SNP economic mismanagement. The SNP will not admit how much leaving the UK would cost Scotland, how much putting up a border between us and our largest trading partner would cost Scotland or how much the uncertainty that has been caused by its confused position on currency would cost Scotland, and it will not address any of the many other questions that, despite having had decades to address, it has failed to come up with even remotely credible answers to.

The SNP's economic record has left Scotland as a high-tax, low-growth economy with crumbling public services. Just as the party has no answers on independence, the SNP offers no real hope to Scotland on economic growth. No wonder many nationalists are jumping ship from the tired, failed party of division.

16:52

Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP): It is worth noting that Goldman Sachs's latest report indicates that the UK's GDP per head currently stands at only 4 per cent above its 2016 figure, compared to 8 per cent for the eurozone and 15 per cent for the US. That proves what everyone who is living in Scotland knows, which is that the UK is the stagnation nation of the developed world.

I will address some of the points that have been made. On tax, it is worth pointing out that the Tories will not acknowledge that the majority of people in Scotland pay less tax than their counterparts in the rest of the UK do. The Tories object to that—I think because those who pay less tax are the lower paid—and the Tories like to turn that on its head, as we see in their proposals. On economic mismanagement, we have the highest ever debt of £2.65 trillion under the Tories—

Brian Whittle: Will the member take an intervention?

Keith Brown: No, I will not. I have only four minutes.

We have the highest tax burden since the second world war—that is what the Tories have done. Apart from being back into recession once again, and apart from having the massive debt that I have just mentioned, we also have the highest tax burden. That is what the Tories do—tax and economic failure.

I am astounded by the brass neck of the Labour Party in trying to put the blame on the Scottish Government, not least when it knows full well—if not from the Scottish Government, then from its friends in the Labour-run Welsh Government—that many of these things are determined by what happens at Westminster. Welsh First Minister Mark Drakeford said:

“We are in this position because of ... the mismanagement of the economy and public finances by successive UK governments over the last 13 years and because of unfunded commitments made by the UK Government”.

He knows what Labour cannot admit in the Scottish Parliament, which is that it is because of the policies of the UK Government, including on immigration and on Brexit—which Labour also now supports—and its failure to properly fund public services, that the UK Government is largely responsible for the state of the economy. Labour cannot admit to that. For that reason, we cannot take Labour's debate seriously. It is not a serious attempt to discuss Scotland's economy; it is superficial and spurious. There are no ideas and there is no willingness to acknowledge the wider context of the economic situation in which we find ourselves.

Willie Rennie spoke about the independence referendum as being a brake on investment. He perhaps forgets the Ernst & Young report that year that indicated that we had a sparkling year—one of the best years ever for foreign direct investment in Scotland, which is on the record. I do not know why he did not want to acknowledge that and, in fact, tried to turn it on its head by saying that there was less foreign investment.

If we do not have powers over corporation tax, business regulation, immigration or trade, or the vast majority of welfare and tax powers, how can we, or any of the devolved Governments, be in any way responsible for the systemic issues that plague the UK economy?

Indeed, I would argue that devolution was designed to keep it that way. For example, when the Scottish Government opts to differentiate income tax, HM Revenue and Customs is still responsible for collecting that tax, and all taxes that are set in Scotland, and the block grant is then reduced. It is no wonder that that is the case, because if Scotland was to be fully, or even marginally, financially independent, even if it was within the UK, the UK Government, the Labour

Party and the Tory party would know that the game was up, and the union would be over before you could say the word “recession”.

There were five periods—five quarters—of recession under the previous Labour Government, but we have not heard that mentioned today. We cannot forget the immortal words of the last Chief Secretary to the Treasury under Gordon Brown—I know that Labour members enjoy this, so I will repeat it. He said that, under Labour, after 13 years in government, “there is no money” left—

Daniel Johnson: Well done for copying George Osborne’s attack line.

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear Mr Brown.

Keith Brown: Labour started the banking crisis, and it is going back to that. It wants to lift the bankers’ bonus cap. It does not want to lift the two-child cap or the rape clause—it wants to look after the bankers and give them ever more money—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Mr Johnson.

Keith Brown: We know how Labour treats Scotland, given the way in which it treated the McCrone report in the mid-1970s. Hide Scotland’s wealth from Scotland—that is the way to do it.

Labour now proposes to take more of Scotland’s wealth to fund nuclear developments in England. The Labour Party is no friend to Scotland or to the Scottish economy; it has proved that time and again. It has lied to, and failed, Scotland, not least—as I said—by saying that “there is no money” left.

Let us not go back to that. If we want to see the management of a regional economy under the Labour Party, we can look at Birmingham City Council, which has a 20-odd per cent increase in council tax and hundreds of redundancies. That is what Labour mismanagement does. We should have had a serious debate today, but we are not going to get that from the Labour Party. The serious option for the Scottish economy is independence, to give us the full powers that we require.

The Presiding Officer: We move to the winding-up speeches.

16:56

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank the Labour Party for bringing the debate to the chamber, because it is extremely important. The measure of GDP may be incomplete, but it matters hugely because of the other benefits that it brings, such as increased tax revenues and economic confidence, to name just two. As Jamie Halcro Johnston rightly said, it is essential for delivering better public services, raising the

standard of living and delivering more secure jobs and investment, and it is the prerequisite to addressing our social ills and improving the wellbeing of the whole country.

It goes without saying that the biggest challenge that we currently face is the extent of economic inactivity. The rates of economic inactivity are worryingly high, which means that we are not making the best use of the skills and talents in our workforce. Willie Rennie was absolutely right when he referenced our universities, and Colin Smyth and Alex Rowley were absolutely right when they mentioned our colleges. Those are essential to ensuring that we have the skills and people who are able to work. Our best policy prospectus is to focus on helping those people back into the workforce and preparing them for future jobs, and on secure jobs and investment.

That is why the Scottish Conservatives were so critical of the SNP’s recent budget, which cut the economy portfolio by 8.3 per cent in real terms, including cuts to enterprise, employability, tourism, the Scottish National Investment Bank and several other aspects of policy that are essential to jobs and investment.

Murdo Fraser referred to what Sandy Begbie said. That is why Scottish Conservatives were so vociferous in their opposition to the recent budget, and it is probably why only 9 per cent of Scottish businesses think that the Scottish Government is sympathetic to their concerns. We heard some of that this morning from one or two members who were at the Scottish Tourism Alliance conference in Aberdeen.

I come to the debate about tax, which is obviously a very big part of the debate about economic growth. I fully acknowledge that the overall tax burden in the UK has grown, and is too high, but it is even worse in Scotland, where the differential is widening and disincentives are increasing. Some in the SNP even acknowledge that fact.

It is vitally important that there is a specific focus on making work pay, and on work becoming more attractive. That is why Jeremy Hunt chose a change to national insurance instead of income tax: because the OBR predicted that that could help 200,000 people back into work. We should be concentrating on that.

On the question that Murdo Fraser was talking about in debate with Daniel Johnson, I gently remind Labour that, although it wants to make itself into the party of growth and lower taxes, it was the Labour Party that voted for the rates resolution in 2023 that ensured that the SNP imposed further tax hikes. Just six months ago, the Labour Party also voted against a Conservative amendment that called on the

Scottish Government to deliver a package of growth policies, including a competitive tax regime, less burdensome regulation and investment in innovation, entrepreneurship and infrastructure. I am not quite sure what was going on there.

I will finish on another issue. As well as taxation, another key debate around economic growth is about meaningful public sector reform, which will deliver the future savings that we so desperately need. I come back to Jeremy Hunt's budget. Brian Whittle mentioned that one of the considerably underreported parts of that was the £3 billion investment in the NHS to reform artificial intelligence data use and streamline IT. We should take that seriously, and the Scottish Government should ensure that we have similar policies.

17:01

The Minister for Small Business, Innovation, Tourism and Trade (Richard Lochhead): I welcome the debate. It is important for the Scottish Parliament to debate the future of Scotland's economy regularly.

We are at a pivotal moment in economic history. The decisions that we take in the next few years will affect future generations and the future success of our economy. The Scottish Government is taking action to ensure that Scotland's economy reaches its full potential, despite the clear difficulties that have resulted from the UK Government's handling of the economy and the aftermath of Brexit.

Earlier this week, the First Minister made a speech in London—

Daniel Johnson: Will the member give way?

Richard Lochhead: I apologise; I have only four minutes. The First Minister quoted Professor Diane Coyle of the University of Cambridge, who recently wrote:

"Investment in productive assets has been lower in the UK than in any of the other G7 countries since at least 1990."

The First Minister went on to say that

"the UK displays a remarkable and persistent level of geographic inequality, with an unhealthy and unstable reliance on this great city of London."

He was, of course, speaking in London.

We are doing this against the backdrop of a broken UK model and Brexit. It is astonishing to have a debate on the future of the Scottish economy when the Labour Party motion and the Conservative Party amendment do not mention Brexit. Like Ivan McKee, I have had insomnia recently, so I have also read "Building a business case for Scotland"—the Labour Party's recent

document—and its introduction by the Labour leader also does not mention Brexit at all, despite the fact that the OBR forecasts that the UK economy will be 4 per cent smaller as a result of Brexit.

When I speak to exporters, they talk about Brexit. When I speak to small businesses, they talk about Brexit. When I speak to our high-growth sectors in Scotland, they talk about Brexit. When I speak to our universities and research institutions, they talk about Brexit. There is, however, not a word on it from Labour or the Conservative Party, although it is crucial to Scotland's economic future.

Liz Smith: Will the minister take an intervention?

Richard Lochhead: I apologise, but I have about one and a half minutes left. I always take interventions, but not when I have only four minutes. I apologise.

Against that backdrop, Scotland is still the top-performing region outside London and the south-east, with the third-highest wages and GVA per person in 2021. Since we came to office in 2007, Scotland's GDP per capita has grown faster than the UK's, and productivity, which the debate focuses on, has grown at an annual average rate of 1 per cent a year in Scotland, compared with the UK's 0.5 per cent a year. On inward investment, we are outperforming the UK and the EU average. This week, a key survey showed that private sector employment in Scotland last month grew faster than in any other UK nation or region.

We are investing in productivity in this country through the National Manufacturing Institute Scotland, the national robotarium, the Michelin Scotland Innovation Parc, the innovation centres, the medicines manufacturing innovation centre, the Fraunhofer centre for applied photonics, the Aberdeen biohub, the Net Zero Technology Centre and, of course, the city and region growth deals. We are investing not just Scottish money and public investment from Scotland, but money from other sources as well. That has been mostly just in the past few years. We are investing more than £100 million to improve productivity in Scotland.

That does not even take us into the debate about the role of AI. The whole world is debating increasing productivity by reducing workforces in all our countries, as well as the role that AI will play in ensuring that we can be more productive and work fewer hours, and the role of automation in relation to that. That is one reason why our high-growth sectors in Scotland are doing extremely well just now.

We can look at industrial biotechnology, life sciences, fintech or our critical technology supercluster—which is quantum photonics, semiconductors and wireless. We can look at

space and games, as well as other sectors, such as whisky, the wider food and drink sector and, of course, the energy transition. We will see very good growth rates in many of those sectors in Scotland, because we are supporting them.

There was an excellent article in *The Herald* today by Ian McConnell, who said that there was cheering news on Scotland's economy, but that

"some do not like it".

We realise that the Labour Party and the Conservatives do not like it, but good things are happening in the Scottish economy at the moment, and we have to continue to support that.

I urge Parliament to back the Scottish Government's amendment.

The Presiding Officer: I call Rhoda Grant to wind up the debate.

17:05

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

In order to have world-class public services, we need to pay for them. If we grow our economy, we can increase our tax take by having more people employed in good-quality, well-paid jobs. The more people we have working and earning, the more we have to spend on the services that they require. That is why the phrase "It's the economy, stupid" gained such traction: if the economy is doing well, public services and people are doing well. Unfortunately, as Daniel Johnson pointed out, our economy is not doing well and neither are our services or our people.

Brian Whittle was right to tie health back to the economy, because we know that, in areas of deprivation and areas where there is low pay, people have a life expectancy of 25 years less than the figure in other areas. That is why the need for economic growth is, if anything, more pressing in those areas, in order to bring equality to those communities.

We need a focus on regional development. Jamie Halcro Johnston talked about the Highlands and Islands and about our road, rail and ferry infrastructure—or, indeed, the lack of it. Infrastructure and connectivity are so important to every region, as they allow them to thrive. When Highlands and Islands Enterprise was empowered and funded, it made such a difference; now, like the South of Scotland Enterprise, which Colin Smyth talked about, it is facing funding cuts.

We need to stop the fragmentation of the enterprise establishment, because businesses now do not know where they are going. We need enterprise establishments with a local focus but a knowledge of what is going on elsewhere to work

together so that a business never pitches up at an enterprise agency and is turned away.

Colin Smyth also pointed out that the more rural and further from the centre of power businesses are, the worse they fare. We need to empower our local enterprise agencies. Jamie Halcro Johnston, too, pointed to the regional responses that were required, because our not empowering people locally causes depopulation.

Many speakers, including Alex Rowley and Colin Smyth, talked about education, training and colleges, which are essential to economic growth. Colleges need to be in tune with their local communities, to know what is required for the local economy. That is important not only for young people but for upskilling and reskilling, as changes happen to the workforce.

Councillor Sandy Keith wrote to Jenny Gilruth to highlight the impact that a 25 per cent cut in staffing in UHI Moray would have on vital parts of Moray's local economy. That is happening everywhere, but Sandy Keith pointed out, with some irony, that the college was an "integral" part of the Moray growth deal board. A cut of a quarter in an establishment that is integral to a regional growth deal seems crazy to me.

Alex Rowley highlighted the importance of schools' attainment, and Colin Smyth referred to the cuts in Skills Development Scotland, which are incredibly worrying.

Daniel Johnson pointed out that the Grangemouth oil refinery is Scotland's only oil refinery and is therefore of strategic importance. We need both of our Governments—the SNP and the Tories—to get round the table to protect the crucial jobs, skills and infrastructure at Grangemouth. Both the Scottish and UK Governments have faced criticism from site workers, who feel that they are being failed and that their livelihoods are at stake. We need the workers and the skills, and we need the infrastructure of the oil and gas industry to play its part, so that we can have a just transition to net zero.

By abandoning that workforce, we are not creating a just transition—we are leaving the workforce behind. The Scottish Labour Party would not do that. We would create great British energy, which would be headquartered in Scotland and would deliver 5,000 jobs and a clean energy system by 2030. If we use a GB energy company to empower our local communities, we would not have the squandered opportunities that we see with ScotWind. We would have local generation, which has brought huge benefits to areas such as Point and Sandwick, in the Western Isles.

Economic growth plays a crucial role in delivering strong public services and social

change. Despite that, the Scottish Government has failed to use the powers that it has to grow the Scottish economy, which is in low growth and low productivity currently. We need a Scottish Government that takes a new approach to the economy, working in partnership with business, to unleash the true economic potential of Scotland and its people.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on growing Scotland's economy.

Business Motions

17:11

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-12470, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 19 March 2024

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Wildlife Management and Muirburn (Scotland) Bill

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 20 March 2024

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
Constitution, External Affairs and Culture;
Justice and Home Affairs

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Scottish Crime Campus and Tackling Serious Organised Crime

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill - UK Legislation

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 21 March 2024

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.15 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.15 pm Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Questions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:

Education and Skills

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Circular Economy (Scotland) Bill

followed by Financial Resolution: Circular Economy (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 26 March 2024

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Gender Representation on Public Boards (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 27 March 2024

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Wellbeing Economy, Net Zero and Energy; Finance and Parliamentary Business

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill

followed by Financial Resolution: Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 28 March 2024

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions: Transport

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week

beginning 18 March 2024, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted.—[George Adam]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-12471, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on an extension to stage 1 of a bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be extended to 26 April 2024.—[George Adam]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:12

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of seven Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motions S6M-12472 to S6M-12476, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments, S6M-12477, on committee remits, and S6M-12478, on substitution on committees.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Cost of Living (Tenant Protection) (Scotland) Act 2022 (Expiry of Section 10: Extension) Regulations 2024 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Rent Adjudication (Temporary Modifications) (Scotland) Regulations 2024 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Landfill Tax (Standard Rate and Lower Rate) Order 2024 (SSI 2024/60) be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Renewables Obligation (Scotland) Amendment Order 2024 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Local Authority (Capital Finance and Accounting) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2024 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees to the following revisions to the remits of committees—

Name of Committee: Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee

Remit: To consider and report on matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Just Transition, with the exception of matters relating to just transition; on matters relating to land reform, natural resources and peatland, Scottish Land Commission, Crown Estate Scotland, and Royal Botanic Garden within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands; and on matters relating to energy within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy.

New remit: To consider and report on matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, the Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Net Zero and Energy, with the exception of matters relating to wellbeing economy, and just transition; and on matters relating to land reform, natural resources and peatland, Scottish Land Commission, Crown Estate Scotland, and Royal Botanic Garden within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands.

Name of Committee: Economy and Fair Work Committee

Remit: To consider and report on matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy with the exception of matters relating to energy; and on matters relating to just transition within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Just Transition.

New remit: To consider and report on matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing

Economy, Net Zero and Energy, with the exception of matters relating to net zero and energy.

That the Parliament agrees that Fulton MacGregor be appointed as the Scottish National Party substitute on the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee.—
[George Adam]

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

Decision Time

17:12

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

There are nine questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Neil Gray is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Sandesh Gulhane will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S6M-12455.2, in the name of Neil Gray, which seeks to amend motion S6M-12455, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on bringing down national health service waiting lists, 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 digital voting.

17:13

Meeting suspended.

17:14

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Neil Gray is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Sandesh Gulhane will fall.

We come to the vote on amendment S6M-12455.2, in the name of Neil Gray. Members should cast their votes now.

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)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)

Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (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, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

Against

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

Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-12455.2, in the name of Neil Gray, is: For 63, Against 51, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The amendment in the name of Sandesh Gulhane falls.

The next question is, that motion S6M-12455, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on bringing down NHS waiting lists, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

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

Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (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, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
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 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-12455, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on bringing down NHS waiting lists, as amended, is: For 63, Against 51, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on health service waiting times across the UK, and around the world; commends the dedicated NHS staff who work to provide the best care possible; believes that all long waits are regrettable and welcomes the progress in delivering a significant reduction for the longest waits; welcomes the opening of two National Treatment Centres within the last 12 months, with a further two centres opening in the coming months, which will provide capacity for an additional 20,000 procedures each year; notes that the Scottish Budget provides over £19.5 billion for health and social care, ensuring a real-terms uplift for the NHS in the face of UK Government austerity; acknowledges that, without the distinct and progressive approach to income tax in the Budget, the NHS and other public services would have £1.5 billion less funding; understands that the UK Government’s decision to cut the Scottish Government’s capital budget by £1.3 billion in real terms by 2027-28 has a direct impact on health infrastructure projects; believes that the £20 billion that the UK Government will lose as a result of its decision to cut national insurance should instead have been invested in NHS services and in infrastructure investment, and understands that the share of Barnett consequential funding that Scotland has lost as a result is around £1.6 billion, and believes that, in order to recover from the combined impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, Brexit and UK Government economic mismanagement, reform and innovation across the health service is required.

The Presiding Officer: I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Màiri McAllan is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Murdo Fraser will fall.

The next question is, that amendment S6M-12457.2, in the name of Màiri McAllan, which seeks to amend motion S6M-12457, in the name of Daniel Johnson, on growing Scotland’s economy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (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, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

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)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 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)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-12457.2, in the name of Màiri McAllan, is: For 63, Against 50, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The amendment in the name of Murdo Fraser falls.

The next question is, that motion S6M-12457, in the name of Daniel Johnson, on growing Scotland's economy, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)

Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (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, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)

Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 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)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-12457, in the name of Daniel Johnson, on growing Scotland's economy, as amended, is: For 63, Against 51, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament notes that, since 2007, Scotland's GDP per capita has grown 10.8% in comparison to the UK's growth of 5.6%; acknowledges that, over the same time period, productivity has increased at an annual average rate of 1% a year in Scotland compared with the UK's 0.5% a year; welcomes the approach taken to the economy by the Scottish Government to build a collaborative relationship with business, industry, workers and trades unions and to create jobs through the development of a green industrial strategy; considers that, in Scotland, a near record high number of people are in payrolled employment and a higher proportion of workers earn the real Living Wage than in the other UK nations, while the gender pay gap and child poverty rates are lower also than the UK's; recognises that the UK economic model has failed to deliver the prosperity to Scotland that is enjoyed by neighbouring countries; further recognises that

the Office for Budget Responsibility forecasts that the UK economy will be 4% smaller as a result of Brexit, a Brexit which is supported by three of the four largest parties in the UK Parliament, and agrees that the best way for Scotland to develop a wellbeing economy, and so match the economic success of Scotland's northern European neighbours, is to become an independent EU member state.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-12472, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I could not get the app to refresh. I would have abstained.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Webber. 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)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)

Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

Abstentions

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-12472, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on approval of an SSI, is: For 80, Against 0, Abstentions 32.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Cost of Living (Tenant Protection) (Scotland) Act 2022 (Expiry of Section 10: Extension) Regulations 2024 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-12473, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on approval of an SSI, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)

Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

Abstentions

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)

White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-12473, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on approval of an SSI, is: For 80, Against 0, Abstentions 32.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Rent Adjudication (Temporary Modifications) (Scotland) Regulations 2024 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: I propose to ask a single question on five Parliamentary Bureau motions. Does any member object?

As no member has objected, the final question is, that motions S6M-12474 to S6M-12476, on approval of SSIs, motion S6M-12477, on committee remits, and motion S6M-12478, on substitution on committees, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Landfill Tax (Standard Rate and Lower Rate) Order 2024 (SSI 2024/60) be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Renewables Obligation (Scotland) Amendment Order 2024 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Local Authority (Capital Finance and Accounting) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2024 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees to the following revisions to the remits of committees—

Name of Committee: Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee

Remit: To consider and report on matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Just Transition, with the exception of matters relating to just transition; on matters relating to land reform, natural resources and peatland, Scottish Land Commission, Crown Estate Scotland, and Royal Botanic Garden within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands; and on matters relating to energy within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy.

New remit: To consider and report on matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, the Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Net Zero and Energy, with the exception of matters relating to wellbeing economy, and just transition; and on matters relating to land reform, natural resources and peatland, Scottish Land Commission, Crown Estate Scotland, and Royal Botanic Garden within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands.

Name of Committee: Economy and Fair Work Committee

Remit: To consider and report on matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy with the exception of

matters relating to energy; and on matters relating to just transition within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Just Transition.

New remit: To consider and report on matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Net Zero and Energy, with the exception of matters relating to net zero and energy.

That the Parliament agrees that Fulton MacGregor be appointed as the Scottish National Party substitute on the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

International Long Covid Awareness Day

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-12371, in the name of Sandesh Gulhane, on international long Covid awareness day 2024. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises that 15 March 2024 is International Long Covid Awareness Day; understands that it is estimated that around 187,000 people have long COVID in Scotland, an estimated 10,000 of which are children; notes that long COVID can cause a myriad of debilitating and often life-altering symptoms; considers that a lack of awareness of long COVID exists among the public, employers, medical professionals and policy makers, and that there is often a stigma that negatively affects the mental health and wellbeing of people with long COVID; notes the view that current Scottish Government funding for initiatives does not go far enough in addressing any need for more effective treatment services and support for people with long COVID; further notes, with regret, the view that there has been a lack of progress in addressing consistency of access to diagnosis and treatment services, that there is a continuing postcode lottery for long COVID support, and that there remains little data for monitoring the current prevalence of long COVID in Scotland to inform the scale of required care; notes the belief that there is a need for clear referral pathways across all NHS boards, including access to multidisciplinary teams of specialists; highlights, with particular concern, reports that there are no specific services aimed at children or young people with long COVID in Scotland, and notes the calls for the Scottish Government to fully implement, without delay, the recommendations in the COVID-19 Recovery Committee report, *Long COVID*.

17:29

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests. I am a practising national health service general practitioner.

I thank all members of the cross-party group on long Covid—especially my co-conveners, Alex Cole-Hamilton and Jackie Baillie—for their much-valued work over the past two and a half years.

On 1 March 2020, Scotland's first case of Covid-19 was confirmed. I pay my respects to the friends and families of the more than 17,600 Scots who have died after contracting that horrible virus.

Today, to commemorate international long Covid awareness day, we are focused on addressing the Scottish Government's failure to adequately support the more than 187,000 Scots who have survived Covid but are yet to fully recover. Ten thousand of those 187,000 Scots are children. Some patients and their families have joined us in the gallery today. Coming here will be a sacrifice for people for the rest of the week, as

they have used up all their energy this week to come here to protest and provide support. They do not want to hear platitudes.

Earlier this afternoon, I hosted a drop-in session in the Parliament for Long Covid Scotland. Patients and families told us that they are weary and tired of having to fight for help. A lot of them were angry. They feel that their pleas have fallen on deaf ears. They have spent three years being fobbed off. They have heard the announcement and promise of cash, but they continue to suffer physical and emotional pain and distress, and they struggle to access specialist support and rehabilitation services. Many are economically devastated by the condition. They include nurses and paramedics, some of whom I met today. They were infected at work and are now unable to work.

In our long Covid debate in March last year, we highlighted a lack of consistency in the Scottish National Party Government's approach to supporting long Covid patients. Its approach is piecemeal and not streamlined. Patients truly feel abandoned by the Government and by the resulting inconsistent care and lack of co-ordination, with no national approach.

As for children, the Long Covid Kids charity tells us that there are still no spaces for young people and that there is no single point of contact, as promised. We understand from Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland that 82 per cent of long Covid sufferers have encountered difficulties accessing services, that 43 per cent were not referred to rehab services and that there is a lack of overall information on self-management of their condition. Seventy-one per cent of long Covid patients who were surveyed said that their mental health had deteriorated, and 40 per cent said that long Covid had affected their ability to work and earn a living. We know that many struggle to access social security payments.

For those fortunate not to be impacted by long Covid, I will briefly describe some of the symptoms that patients live with. Those include severe fatigue, dizziness, brain fog, pains in their joints, poor mental health, slurred speech, indescribable headaches, fluctuating heart rates, numbness and gastrointestinal issues. Long Covid is a very complex condition, which is why our response must be shaped by best clinical practice, not by managers or bean counters. Continuing to pass patients between services and departments like batons, with no one taking responsibility, will not wash for our visitors in the gallery. They have had enough.

I am particularly upset by the Scottish Government's poor response because, when we saw the problem unfolding, we could have shared solutions. Long Covid was the focus of my maiden speech in the Parliament on 27 May 2021. By

June, I had authored a long Covid paper—a proposed action plan to invest in a network of specialist clinics, including virtual clinics and app-based treatment services, and provide ring-fenced funding for long Covid care and research. We wanted to get the very best from across the United Kingdom and bring it here. We needed clear rehab pathways, including multidisciplinary teams with GPs, physios and occupational therapists.

On 9 September 2021, the health secretary at the time, Humza Yousaf, announced £10 million for long Covid. The response to a freedom of information request has shown that, instead of the funding covering three years, it is now covering four years. Over a year after that, on 14 March 2023—members will recall that the political landscape had shifted and the health secretary, Humza Yousaf, was about to become First Minister—175,000 Scots were struggling with long Covid. We were informed that that funding had provided £20,000 for public health intelligence gathering in the Western Isles, £120,000 for self-management resources and peer support in the Highlands and £178,000 to develop a long Covid rehab pathway in Fife.

However, a total of just £1.1 million was spent by health boards and organisations from the fund during 2022-23. That included awards of £144,000 to Covid Aid, an online support group that was closed down a year later. Only NHS Lanarkshire received more long Covid money for treating patients in 2022 than that website.

During the 2023-24 financial year, more than £2.7 million was allocated, including £600,000 to NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and £370,000 to NHS Lothian. However, what matters is not the money but the action and outcomes, because patients are not spreadsheets. From what we heard today, patients do not feel as though they are getting the access to rehab, people and treatment that they believe they should, and deserve to, get.

We know that long Covid is complex and that research is on-going, but the most important thing that we can do is listen to people who have long Covid, who are suffering and struggling, involve them and get them into our treatment centres to give them the support that they deserve.

17:36

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): I thank our colleague Sandesh Gulhane for bringing today's debate to the chamber. I apologise for not meeting people earlier today, as I was out of Parliament on a long-established visit to speak at a university. However, I have listened to what has been said.

This is an important issue because, as the motion states, it is estimated that 187,000 people in Scotland have long Covid and that 10,000 of them are children. I agree with Sandesh Gulhane that there is not enough awareness of the debilitating effects of long Covid and the huge number of people who are suffering from its effects. In that vein, I hope that the international day of long Covid awareness, as well as today's debate, will better inform people in general and provide focus for those who are investigating and seeking to develop treatments for the illness.

On the level of Government involvement, when attempting to evaluate any progress or when levelling any perceived criticisms, it is essential to recognise that long Covid was born out of an unprecedented global pandemic and was discovered only in the past couple of years. I will leave the minister to talk about how it is being addressed by the Government.

I say that not to detract from the seriousness of the issue that we are debating today or the suffering of so many people with long Covid, but simply in the hope that, when we debate the issue, we recognise the fact that, as with any new diagnosis, it will possibly take some time to develop and deliver treatments, which we need to do as soon as we can.

I agree that, in Scotland, we need to do everything that we can to understand and treat long Covid, but we must also make more of an effort to look at the issue as a continuation of the pandemic. There needs to be a co-ordinated response to the issue. When Covid-19 struck and the world reeled from its effects, we came together to identify, understand and develop a vaccine against the virus and then to roll out vaccination programmes on a global level. We need to approach long Covid in the same way. Although we know that more than 180,000 people in Scotland are estimated to suffer from the disease and illness, the global figure is, by conservative estimates, more than 65 million, although it is probably a great deal more.

Long Covid is a global issue that needs a global response, and I hope that Scotland can be at the heart of it. The 2023 demystifying long Covid international conference took place in December in Madrid. Would Scotland, the Scottish Government or, indeed, our Parliament consider staging such an event to bring together experts here and globally to better understand the issue and to work together to develop effective treatments?

Scottish universities have a global reputation for excellence, and their work with medical science companies is second to none. Putting Scotland at the heart of global efforts to carry out research and develop effective treatments for long Covid would

have numerous benefits, including, first and foremost, helping those who are suffering. It would also benefit our education and pharma sectors by attracting global funding, which, ultimately, could help to fund a number of the actions that are called for in today's motion. I therefore want Scotland to take a lead in research and development and to make that happen. I am keen to hear from the minister on the obvious and potential benefits of placing Scotland front and centre.

Every day, we learn more. Only today, it was reported that studies have shown that active Covid antigens were found in the blood of long Covid sufferers up to 14 months after infection, and for more than two years in tissue samples. That has the potential to revolutionise how we treat this disgusting disease. We must put Scotland at the centre of that revolution.

17:40

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I join others in congratulating Sandesh Gulhane on securing the debate and on the considered view that he offered to the chamber. I say to Bill Kidd that I do not disagree with very much that was in his speech. I also thank Long Covid Scotland and Long Covid Kids Scotland for the work that they do all year round to advocate on behalf of those who live with long Covid, and I acknowledge their presence in the public gallery.

This is the third time that we have debated long Covid in the Scottish Parliament, and it is a matter of considerable regret that very little has changed since the first time, other than that we are now on our third cabinet secretary. No new funding, research or treatments have been offered, and the Scottish Government has even stopped gathering regular and frequent data on how many people are affected; disappointingly, it has never been interested in gathering data on prevalence among children.

The result is that we are in the dark, effectively, about how many people truly live with long Covid. Estimates are in the region of 187,000 adults. Although we might not know the exact numbers, we know that each reinfection of Covid-19 increases the chance of long Covid, and that around one in 10 Covid infections leads to long-term symptoms.

No one is immune to the risk—yet vaccination, which is acknowledged as the best form of protection, is now restricted to those over 75 and people who are immunosuppressed. Long Covid will not just go away, and the Government cannot pretend that it is not a big deal, as it appears to do with similar illnesses such as ME/chronic fatigue syndrome. The truth is that, due to the paltry level

of support from the Scottish Government, the NHS is failing to adequately support Scotland's long Covid population.

A report that was published last week by Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland, which was referenced by Sandesh Gulhane, found that 72 per cent of people with long Covid

“said there was support they needed but weren't able to access”;

82 per cent

“encountered some kind of difficulty in accessing services, with some struggling to access any medical support”;

and 38 per cent said that

“their doctor wasn't able to provide guidance on available support.”

That is not good enough.

The long Covid support fund, which was £10 million over three years, is now entering its final year, although I hear that it may be stretched over four years. Perhaps the minister will clarify that. Single-year funding has led to underspends and difficulties in recruiting staff. Any board that wants to run a specific long Covid clinic has been told no—and, frankly, £12.88 per person is simply not enough. What has happened to the £27 million in Barnett consequentials for long Covid that is estimated to have come from the UK Government?

Properly funding long Covid treatment is not just a medical necessity but an economic necessity. A report that was written by the European Commission in January this year found that

“Long COVID symptoms”

hugely

“affect individuals' capacity to participate in the labour market”.

The Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland survey confirms that, indicating that 40 per cent of people who live with long Covid are unable to work at all, due to their condition. That equates to as many as 72,000 Scots exiting the labour market since 2020.

Put simply, the SNP Government is failing those with long Covid—warm words will not cut it any more. The Scottish Government must take the crisis in hand; properly fund long Covid services; ensure accurate data collection; and implement the recommendations from the COVID-19 Recovery Committee's “Long COVID” report as a matter of urgency. It must also commit to improving public health messaging on long Covid; fund new co-produced research with lived experience at its heart; and ensure equitable access to co-produced health and social care services with the specialist multidisciplinary teams that are required.

It is time to properly treat and fund long Covid once and for all. I sincerely hope that the minister and the cabinet secretary are listening, because long Covid sufferers will not go away quietly—no matter how much the Government may want them to do so—and, frankly, they cannot wait any longer. I ask the Government to act.

17:45

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I thank my friend and colleague, Sandesh Gulhane, for bringing the debate to the chamber. Having looked back at my time on the COVID-19 Recovery Committee when we did an investigation into long Covid, and having listened to some of the sufferers we spoke to outside Parliament today, it is disquieting that some of the same things are being said several years later and that we do not seem to have made any progress at all.

It struck me that many of those who are suffering from long Covid are the essential workers—healthcare workers, teachers and the police—on whom we relied during the Covid pandemic. Many of those people are unable to work or are losing their jobs. We know that 187,000 people are now estimated to be suffering from long Covid. The debate that we have just had on how we want to move our economy forward touched on the issue of those who are economically inactive; surely, that issue is a reason for us to take long Covid a lot more seriously than we currently do.

At the time when we had the long Covid inquiry—I am going back by about three years—it was said that the condition was not being recognised by the health profession. People did not know where to go to seek advice about the condition, and there was only one long Covid nurse in the whole of Scotland. Yet, here we are again, all this time later, hearing the same thing. We have not moved on, which is disappointing. We need the provision of specialist treatment. We need to gather the data and understand the research—not just in Scotland, but globally. Again, those calls came from the committee's report on long Covid two or three years ago, when we were saying the same things.

I recognise that the healthcare system is under stress. However, there are an estimated 187,000 sufferers of long Covid. I have to confess that I have had long Covid myself, although much less severely than some of the people to whom we spoke earlier today, and it still affects me and my system. I do not in any way, shape or form have the same issues as the people who we met today. However, given that it still affects me every now and again, two to three years later, I can only imagine what it is like for people who have a more serious form of the condition. They talk about

having joint pain, chest pain, abdominal pain, brain fog and the inability to think straight and headaches. Those symptoms come back and revisit them often.

We need to take long Covid much more seriously than we currently do. We need a pathway for diagnosis and treatment. I understand that £10 million was put into long Covid, but that was for a period of four years; £2.5 million per year is not going to scratch the surface. We need to start looking at diagnosis, pathways, research and gathering the data. We also need dedicated healthcare professionals who have experience in long Covid treatment because to this day, many of our healthcare professionals are unaware of how to diagnose long Covid and how to treat it.

Once again, I thank Sandesh Gulhane for bringing the debate to the chamber. I thank the people who are in the public gallery for taking the time out to come here—I know that they will pay for it. I say to the Government that it is time that we had a plan to deal with the condition once and for all.

17:49

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): I thank Sandesh Gulhane for bringing this important debate to the chamber this afternoon. My thoughts are with those who have lost their lives and those who continue to live with long Covid.

A recent report from Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland highlights that Covid is still shattering lives, with around 180,000 people in Scotland suffering from long Covid. Far be it from me to correct Jackie Baillie, but the Liberal Democrats brought the first long Covid debate to the chamber in November 2021. At the time, Alex Cole-Hamilton said:

“I am dismayed, however, that we are already 18 or 19 months into the pandemic, and it is at least 12 months since the first sufferers of the condition that we now know as long Covid had that condition identified. It is disappointing, therefore, that it has taken Opposition time, in a members’ business debate, to lead, for the first time, on this important subject in the chamber.”—[*Official Report*, 9 November 2021; c 75.]

I am a member of the cross-party group on long Covid, which continues to advocate for those who are living with long Covid and raises the issue repeatedly with the Scottish Government, as do Long Covid Scotland and Long Covid Kids Scotland.

I am sure that we all know someone who has had their life turned upside down due to having had Covid. Some people are now entering the fifth year of a new phase in their life, and I am sure that we have all had constituents reach out from the situation in which they find themselves, adjusting

to their new reality and describing feeling helpless as they try to restore some of their previous wellbeing.

I have previously mentioned a constituent of mine who raised with me the lack of dedicated care for children who are living with long Covid. The parent told me:

“Our son is very unwell again and it is utterly devastating to see. The lack of support for children with long covid and their families in Scotland is a national disgrace.”

Long Covid has affected people of all ages, and it has had a profound effect on the development, socialisation and learning of young people who are living with long Covid, as well as, obviously, on their health. The COVID-19 Recovery Committee’s report on long Covid highlighted the lack of research or guidance on the impact of long Covid on children and young people.

Another constituent whom I met recently has had long Covid for 14 months. The life that he had before is not the same as the life that he has now. He has had to give that up, including his job, his home and his sport, and he now relies on support from his family. He has no complaints about the support that he gets from his GP, but he is surprised at the slow progress that has been made in the treatment and diagnosis pathway here in Scotland.

People are spending their life savings on support from private clinics elsewhere in the UK and in Europe, because of the postcode lottery of treatment and support. Put simply, if someone has long Covid in Scotland, the Scottish Government has allocated around £16 towards their treatment and care in totality. The amount of money that is spent on the condition in England is almost 10 times what it is here.

To conclude, we need to do more to recognise that Covid is still among us and to prevent adults and children from catching it in the first place. The Scottish Government needs to adopt a comprehensive and fully funded long Covid strategy to support those who are living with long Covid. Such a strategy should build awareness among employers so that they can recognise it for the disability that it is. We should be giving occupational therapy and social care to everyone who needs them, particularly those who are managing the condition from home. All that needs to work hand in hand with enhanced psychological support to recognise the impact that long Covid has on people’s mental health.

17:53

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): I thank Sandesh Gulhane for bringing this important motion to Parliament.

The shadow of Covid-19 hangs over all of us. It has left its mark: front-line workers not supplied with personal protective equipment, which there was a legal duty of care to provide; our most vulnerable citizens—care home residents—placed in unnecessary, mortal danger, their basic human rights denied and discarded; parents of critically ill children unable to be with them in hospital emergency departments; children unable to say goodbye to dying parents; funerals unmarked.

All of the while, both Governments chose not to follow World Health Organization advice. They chose not to follow the basic principles of public health and infectious disease control. They chose not to test, and the shadow is still with us.

As members of this Parliament we meet some extraordinary people, and I can think of no group who have made a bigger impression on me than the long Covid support group that meets in Brighton's parish church hall. For too long ignored as individuals, they got organised as a collective. Up against bureaucracy, they adopted the values of self-help, mutual aid and support, and they provide a united voice. Where once they were invisible and silent, they are now highly visible and justifiably vocal.

When I meet the group, they tell me that they are still falling through the gaps of what they always believed to be a cradle-to-the-grave system. The first time I met the group, I spoke to a woman with long Covid who still worked night shifts, was now in her 60s and had worked since she left school at 16, was struggling with both her physical health and her mental health, but simply could not afford to retire. It could make you weep.

Misdiagnosis is common. All too often, women are told that they have the menopause, not long Covid. One of my old shop stewards, who is in the group, put it starkly when he said:

"If you're thinking about going out, you have to think about getting back."

Many in the group now have chronic respiratory conditions, and we know that long-term conditions are even less adequately funded than acute care in our public health system.

The one ray of light that shone through the shadow of Covid-19 was the rekindling of the principles of solidarity, sacrifice and human co-operation. That it did not reach those lawmakers who secretly and criminally organised mass social gatherings, then tried to cover them up—and who even now show no contrition—should not surprise us, but it should stir us into action, because there is a better way.

We cannot right all of the wrongs of the past, but we can tackle the injustices of the present. That is not merely a job for Government; it is the duty of

every single member of this Parliament. We must all be led by long Covid sufferers and their families, like those I meet in Brighton's. We need to empower them and give them agency, so that our value systems, our institutional forms and our political response are shaped by them, driven by them and all bound together with the solemn guiding principle that we remember the dead but that we fight for the living.

17:57

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): I, too, commend colleagues for securing the debate. I look forward to hearing the Government's response, building on the funding and planning that have already been proposed.

What more will be done to support my constituents with long Covid? As part of those considerations, I want to raise awareness of a group of people in my constituency with ME who have been in touch with me for some time, and whom I have sought to represent. That is, unfortunately, a growing community, in my constituency and indeed internationally, because of the parallels between and synergies of the suffering of those with long Covid and those with ME.

I wish briefly to emphasise the importance of considering ME in tandem with how we support people with long Covid. ME should not be forgotten. There have been more and more cases of ME internationally since the outbreak of the pandemic. Such conditions require particular attention for individuals, with their various symptoms, but the same debilitating effects are present among those with ME and those with long Covid. Those people need our help, and I look forward to hearing about what further actions—research, support and treatment—the Scottish Government may be able to undertake.

17:59

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): I, too, thank Sandesh Gulhane for securing tonight's debate. Like Beatrice Wishart, I hope that, one day, we might have a Government-led debate on this subject, which would show that the Government is taking it seriously.

Although the World Health Organization declared the Covid-19 public health emergency to be over in May 2023, Covid has never gone away. Covid-19 has now moved to its endemic phase. Although the Scottish Government lifted its measures to deal with the pandemic in August 2021, years later, for the estimated 187,000 people in Scotland who are living with long Covid, the pandemic has still not ended.

Long Covid can be life changing for those who are affected by it. It causes fatigue and breathlessness, among other symptoms. It can completely change the lives of people who had previously been perfectly healthy. We saw that at the drop-in session that we had earlier today.

Long Covid can affect anyone, and it can affect them after any exposure that they have had to Covid. It is estimated that one in 10 cases of Covid develops into long Covid, as happened to the daughter of one of my constituents, Helen Goss, who has had to take legal action against NHS Grampian because of the poor—or non-existent—long Covid treatment that her daughter has received. Regrettably, Helen has been forced to go down the route of legal action, as it seemed to be the only viable option for her to secure and progress the healthcare that her daughter, Anna, urgently requires and rightfully deserves.

As a parent, I cannot imagine what Helen is going through. She desperately wants to get help for her daughter, and she must feel frustrated about the lack of help that she is receiving. What has it come to when parents are having to go to court to get medical assistance? The NHS and the Government are letting such people down.

However, Helen is not the only one. Today, I have talked to other parents and grandparents who are having to fight to get the treatment that their children and grandchildren deserve. How can that be right? Ten thousand kids are being let down. We cannot leave them behind.

To protect people from the detrimental impact of long Covid, prevention is key. I draw the Scottish Government's attention to the petition that Sally Witcher lodged in December 2023, which called on the Scottish Government to do more to help to prevent the spread of Covid and, by extension, the likelihood of people developing long Covid. We all know that one of the best ways of preventing the spread of Covid is by increasing ventilation. In NHS England, the UK Government is encouraging the use of high-efficiency particulate absorbing filters in public buildings. NHS England recognises the important role that HEPA filters can play in reducing the transmission of Covid-19.

Despite the fact that HEPA filters have an efficiency level of more than 99 per cent, their use is not being replicated in NHS Scotland. As I remember, the only ventilation method that was proposed by the devolved Government was sawing the bottom off classroom doors. The Scottish Government must ensure that a joined-up approach is taken, which brings to the forefront mitigation measures such as greater ventilation in new buildings and upgrades to ventilation in existing buildings.

Long Covid has a debilitating impact on those who have contracted it. The socioeconomic impact is obvious: it stops people working, which has a long-term effect on local economies, as Brian Whittle said earlier. Prevention is key to ensuring that people avoid contracting long Covid.

As we have heard, this is the third debate that the Parliament has had on the subject. It is time that the Scottish Government listened to campaigners and finally acted, for those who are suffering cannot wait any longer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Fulton MacGregor, who will be the final speaker in the open debate.

18:03

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): Thank you, Presiding Officer. Originally, I was not down to speak, so I appreciate you bringing me in. I thank Sandesh Gulhane for lodging his motion on this extremely important issue.

The minister will be aware—as will her predecessor—that, for some time, I have been raising the case of a constituent of mine, Jonathan McMullen, who was at high school when he contracted Covid but is now a young man. As a result of long Covid, his whole life has been totally changed. For long periods, he was not able to get out of bed. His mum, Tracy McMullen, who has been an ardent campaigner for Jonathan—and, by extension, long Covid sufferers—has spoken to me about how that has impacted him, his life and his future. They have had to fight for absolutely everything. They have had to fight with medical professionals, local authorities and others just to be heard. For example, Jonathan has postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome—POTS—but they have had to fight for that to be recognised and to get appropriate treatment and appointments. That fight is still on-going. I say to Jonathan and his mum: please know that you will always have my support with that, as your MSP.

People face brick wall after brick wall because, as other members said, there is a lack of understanding of what the symptoms are and are not. What do people know? That is not the fault of professionals. More needs to be done on long Covid so that people in the profession know what they are dealing with when somebody presents with the condition. We need more research into long Covid. We need to learn more about it.

The minister will not mind me saying this, because I come to the chamber to stand up for my constituents on the issues that they bring to me. She knows, and the Government knows because I have raised it in the chamber, that I think that folk with long Covid are being left behind and that we

need to do more. Scotland is probably not unique in that we are catching up as we come out of the pandemic, but Bill Kidd made some important points. Scotland used to lead the way on things. As part of the UK, we led the way on the vaccine for tackling Covid. We need to do more to tackle long Covid, lead the way again and get in front on it.

Bill Kidd made a great suggestion. His speech prompted me to press my request-to-speak button, because I have raised Jonathan's case in the chamber several times. There is potential for a summit in Scotland that brings together experts so that we learn what we know and do not know about long Covid, learn what could and could not work and, as Ben Macpherson mentioned, link it to ME and other similar diseases, as there are some indications that there might be overlap.

Let us lead the way on the matter. Let us be bold. I say to other parties that we should not play a blame game about not doing enough or not doing X, Y and Z. Let us work together on long Covid across the chamber and across society, because a growing number of people need it. Every member will have had long Covid constituents and will continue to get more. There is a duty on all of us to try to get the approach right, to back the minister's approach to taking the matter forward and to try to work together.

18:07

The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto): I, too, will reflect on the experience of people who have lost loved ones through Covid and of those who are living with long Covid. I thank Sandesh Gulhane for bringing this important debate to the chamber and all speakers for their considered contributions.

I, too, welcome the people who are in the public gallery. I recognise that, for many of them who live with long Covid, it will not have been a small undertaking to travel to be with us. I was pleased to spend my lunch time with members of Long Covid Scotland and others outside the Parliament and, at the drop-in session later on, to listen to people's thoughts, concerns and disappointment. I thank them all from my heart for being so candid in sharing the challenges that they live with daily. I also thank them for the constructive provocations that they gave me to consider.

The contributions to the debate have clearly highlighted the significant impact that long Covid continues to have on the lives of adults and children who live with the condition across Scotland. I will meet Long Covid Scotland and Long Covid Kids Scotland, including Fulton MacGregor's constituent, later this month.

I understand that symptoms vary considerably and can be unpredictable and unrelenting. Long Covid can impact on every aspect of daily life, not just physical health. I have been struck by stories of the impact on relationships, education and employment, as the briefing that Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland provided for the debate reminds us.

International long Covid awareness day, which is marked later this week, is an important milestone in bringing those issues into sharp focus, and so, too, was the COVID-19 Recovery Committee's consideration of the subject. I thank everyone who took the opportunity to contribute to the process—the MSPs, stakeholders and those with lived experience. Since the publication of the committee's report, progress has been made in a number of key areas, and I am pleased to have the opportunity to outline some of that.

On funding, we remain committed to delivering the £10 million long Covid support fund in full. Members might be aware that NHS boards do not require to fully utilise long Covid support funding made available to them over the first year of the fund. We have therefore made plans to allocate the remainder of the fund over the coming financial year and the next one. We will also consider baselining long Covid support funding for NHS boards at a level to be determined, based on the progress made by NHS boards over 2023-24.

Jackie Baillie: My recollection—the minister should correct me if I am wrong—is that the underspend in the first year was allocated very quickly to a range of organisations. Is the £10 million being stretched over four years? There is no spare money in the system; the Government allocated it.

Jenni Minto: It is fair to say that not every board spent its allocation. We are ensuring that boards do so. As was pointed out in a number of speeches, it takes quite a while to employ people. However, we are committed to spending the £10 million.

It is simply not true that the Scottish Government received any consequential that directly relate to the resource that NHS England allocated for long Covid, as that was not new funding.

On public information, we have worked with NHS Inform, which is Scotland's national health information service, to update the range of long Covid information available on its site. That followed a user research exercise to allow us to better understand the experiences of those living with long Covid, as well as their suggestions on priorities for further development of the content.

On education for healthcare professionals, a suite of updated educational resources has been

published on NHS Education for Scotland's Turas learning platform to improve healthcare staff's knowledge and understanding of long Covid. Specifically on children and young people, the national strategic network for long Covid is currently developing a clinical pathway to support the appropriate assessment, referral and management for children and young people with long Covid symptoms. Once that work is completed, the information will be shared with NHS boards for local implementation.

Brian Whittle: As part of the committee's investigation of long Covid recovery, we took evidence from health boards not only across the UK but across the world on their experiences of, and how they are dealing with, the problem of long Covid. Obviously, the problem is not just here. Is the Scottish Government still pooling data and recommendations from around the world?

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

Jenni Minto: I will touch on that issue later.

The motion highlights the importance of clear referral pathways. I can update members on that. Twelve of our 14 NHS boards now have long Covid pathways in operation for adults. Elsewhere, boards have well-established referral pathways to a range of services that can provide support to people with symptoms resulting from long Covid.

I was very pleased to visit NHS Ayrshire and Arran earlier this week. It might be worth while for Mr Whittle to visit the service there. *[Interruption.]* I hear that he already has—that is great. I met the team that is responsible for the planning and delivery of the board's long Covid multidisciplinary pathway and heard about how it is utilising funding made available through the Scottish Government's £10 million long Covid support fund. The pathway provides a single point of access for assessment and co-ordinated support to help people to manage their long Covid symptoms. The service has physiotherapy, occupational therapy and nursing support, and it liaises with primary and secondary care and third sector partners.

It is clear that a multidisciplinary team is important—a number of members have noted that. Having spoken to that team, I certainly felt that its commitment to continuous improvement and learning was obvious, whether that is through undertaking additional training, learning from and sharing the unique skills and expertise that each member brings to the multidisciplinary team, learning from the experiences of peers in other NHS boards and elsewhere, or listening to patients, which is important, as a number of members have mentioned.

In that respect, our national strategic network for long Covid is important in giving our territorial NHS

boards a forum for sharing learning and best practice from within and beyond Scotland in developing support services for people who live with the condition, as Brian Whittle suggested.

I, too, was privileged to meet someone who told me about their experience of developing long Covid and the impact that it continued to have on their daily life. Hearteningly, they spoke about how the expertise and support provided to them through the long Covid pathway was a significant milestone in their journey with long Covid.

The points that Ben Macpherson made struck me, too, when I spoke to that patient, as she drew connections with ME and its debilitating effects. Scotland is doing some research in the Western general hospital in Edinburgh, which I have visited, and I will maintain in my thoughts the possible connection between ME and long Covid.

I was also struck by the reflections on the care and compassion of the multidisciplinary team and the value that patients placed on being listened to and validated by healthcare professionals. That, too, resonates with what many members have said this evening.

I want to make it clear that I absolutely recognise that there is more to do to ensure that people's experiences of accessing healthcare support are consistent. We remain committed to working closely with our national strategic network, which has commissioned the University of Leeds to support the initial evaluation of long Covid services in Scotland.

I appreciate that the limitations of the long Covid treatment approaches that are currently available globally will be a source of frustration for those who live with the condition, but we need to ensure that treatments are evidence based. There is still a great deal to be learned about long Covid, which is why we are contributing to the worldwide research effort to better understand the condition.

Our chief scientist office has awarded a total of about £3.1 million for 11 projects on the long-term effects of Covid-19. That includes projects to better understand the underlying risk factors of long Covid, to examine the effects on cognitive function, to evaluate rehabilitation approaches and to examine access and explore how to improve people's support through primary care. I use this opportunity to highlight the fact that the chief scientist office's research funding schemes are open to applications on long Covid. Those would go through CSO standard independent expert review processes to allow funding decisions to be made.

I note the proposal that Fulton MacGregor made about a summit, and I am happy to take that away and speak to my officials about it.

In closing, I again acknowledge the significant impact that long Covid can have on the lives of people who directly experience it, as well as those closest to them, and I reiterate that supporting people who live with long Covid remains a priority for the Government.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate.

Meeting closed at 18:18.

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