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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 9 October 2024

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

Portfolio Question Time

Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, and Parliamentary Business

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): Good afternoon. The first item of business is portfolio question time. The first portfolio is constitution, external affairs and culture, and parliamentary business.

Arts Funding

1. Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has to address reported concerns regarding the future of arts funding in Scotland. (S6O-03813)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): I appreciate that the culture sector needs to have stable and supportive financial arrangements in place in order to fulfil its potential. This year, we have committed £15.8 million more than in 2023-2024. The Scottish Government budget on 4 December will be in line with the commitment to an additional £100 million per year for culture funding by 2028-2029 and will be subject to the normal parliamentary processes for approval.

Alexander Stewart: Scotland's arts sector has been plunged into further uncertainty after the Scottish National Party Government delayed a critical multiyear funding decision, which left more than 280 organisations in limbo.

With theatres, festivals and venues already warning of collapse and broken promises, does the cabinet secretary accept that the Government's failure to provide budget clarity is deepening the crisis in the arts sector? What plans are in place to restore trust and stability to those vital organisations?

Angus Robertson: I am very much in favour of providing budget clarity to everybody in the culture sector, but I am sure that Mr Stewart would agree that that happens as part of the budgetary process. As soon as we have been able to go through the budget, I hope that we will be on the way to continuing to increase culture spending in Scotland to that annual target of an additional £100 million by 2028-29.

That is subject to normal budgetary processes and would support the introduction of—among other things, and it is very important to the sector—multiyear funding for organisations and venues the length and breadth of the country.

I hope that the Government will have the support of all parties and all members for the budget process and for the vote on the budget.

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): I very much welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to provide an additional £100 million annually in arts funding by 2028-29. That is a clear vote of confidence in the sector.

Can the cabinet secretary say more about how current funding for culture in Scotland compares with the funding that is provided elsewhere in the United Kingdom?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary, please answer with a focus on matters that are within your portfolio responsibility.

Angus Robertson: It is important to understand the trends in culture spending both in Scotland and in the rest of the United Kingdom. There has been a reduction in the culture budget for England this year, with a similar approach from the Welsh Government, whereas, in Scotland, this year we have committed £15.8 million more for 2024-25. That is the first stage in our commitment to an additional £100 million annually by 2028-29. I believe that I am right in saying that that would constitute the biggest-ever increase in culture funding since the beginning of devolution.

Creative Scotland

2. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on whether Creative Scotland is fit for purpose as an arts funding body. (S6O-03814)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): I welcome Murdo Fraser to his role as culture spokesman for the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party, and I offer him—as I have his predecessors and front-bench colleagues of all parties—an open door. I look forward to working with him where we can find agreement.

I recognise the important role that Creative Scotland plays in supporting the arts, screen and creative industries. The programme for government included a commitment to undertake a review of Creative Scotland as part of a wider commitment to review the way in which the culture sector is supported. The decision to review Creative Scotland is normal practice in ensuring that the functions and remits of public bodies continue to meet the needs of Scotland.

Murdo Fraser: I thank the cabinet secretary for his kind words of welcome.

He knows that Creative Scotland is a body that is wreathed in scandal. An £85,000 grant for an explicit sex film was withdrawn after a public outcry, and a Creative Scotland literature officer called bookshops to demand that they stop stocking a book by a gender-critical writer, Jenny Lindsay.

Meanwhile, as Alexander Stewart says, arts grants are being cut. If money is tight in the culture sector, is it not time that we took an axe to this bloated and failing quango and, instead, diverted that money to those who produce artistic output at the grass roots, where they are desperately in need of it?

Angus Robertson: In the spirit of welcoming Mr Fraser to his position, I acknowledge that he has come at it from a standing start and is trying to get up to speed with the ins and outs of all the challenges of the portfolio.

I hope that he agrees that it is important that we have an arm's-length arts funding organisation and that it is not for the culture secretary to micromanage its artistic decisions. He has raised some issues and, no doubt, those questions will be looked at as part of the review, in which it will be open to all colleagues to share their thoughts.

Mr Fraser has views on where funds could be redistributed. Funding will, no doubt, play an important part in the consideration of the review, but it will go beyond that. I encourage him to put his suggestions down on paper. I will read them with very close interest. I hope that we all have a shared interest in making sure that creatives across Scotland are appropriately funded. If there are ways in which the review should consider that, I would very much welcome those suggestions.

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): How will the recently announced review of Creative Scotland help to maximise the impact of public funding for the cultural sector?

Angus Robertson: Creative Scotland distributes a significant proportion of Scottish Government funding to the culture sector, which amounts to £66 million this year. The review is part of a broader review of how the sector is funded and will ensure that the significant extra funding of £100 million a year by 2028-29 is put to best use.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): I am sure that the cabinet secretary will join me in welcoming the announcement by the United Kingdom Government that it is increasing tax relief for independent film producers.

Last week, he told the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee that the Creative Scotland review

“will not be a Government review”,

that he will not sit at the head of it and that

“others will look very closely at how things operate”.— [Official Report, Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee, 3 October 2024; c 10-11.]

Can he confirm that it will be a fully independent review with an independent chair and that it will be independently run? Who will sit at the top of it, and who are the others he referred to?

Angus Robertson: I thank Neil Bibby for his question. That reflects a view across the chamber that there should be a review of Creative Scotland's future operations. There has not been any such inquiry since 2010. We are currently considering the modalities of the review, and I want it to take place as soon as possible. I will not be sitting at the head of it—I can assure him of that. If Neil Bibby has any suggestions as to people whom he thinks are best qualified to lead such a review, I would be grateful to hear them. Nobody has been ruled out and nobody has been ruled in. If he thinks that there are people who are well qualified to do it, I would be keen to hear from him.

Scottish Government International Offices

3. **Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the work of its international offices. (S6O-03815)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): In the coming weeks, I will publish the second annual report on Scotland's international network. That will again illustrate how Scottish Government and Scottish Development International teams overseas and in London contribute to delivering tangible benefits to Scotland's people, businesses and institutions, having supported £1.73 billion in forecast export sales and more than 8,500 jobs in 2022-23. Their efforts are a key part of the reason that, for the ninth year running, the Ernst & Young attractiveness survey shows that Scotland has been the top destination in the United Kingdom, outside London, for foreign direct investment. I hope that Mr Kerr will join me in thanking the hard-working Scottish network staff for their successful work in that area.

Stephen Kerr: My question was about the international offices. The cabinet secretary will know of my long-standing scepticism about the so-called embassies. Like many Scots, I view them as just another Scottish National Party vanity

project. I invite him to convince me that they are not.

Angus Robertson: I would very much like Scotland to have an embassy network like those of other independent countries. We unfortunately do not have that at the moment. I will quantify that—I think that that it is the benefit of having an annual review, and I am surprised that Mr Kerr was not convinced by last year's statistics. I will update him, as perhaps he has not read the review.

Through the international network, Scottish Development International provided support that resulted in trade worth £1.7 billion. More than 1,000 planned real living wage jobs in Scotland are associated with investment that was supported by the Scottish Government office in the United States of America. More than £120 million in planned capital investment was supported by the Scottish Government office in Canada, and more than 360 companies were supported by the Scottish Government office in the USA. Those are just North American statistics. I could go on, but I do not have time enough to do so.

I will make sure that Mr Kerr has the updated second annual report. I hope that he will welcome it, and I hope that he will take the opportunity to thank all those people who work in Scottish Government offices, all the SDI staff around the world and the more than 1,200 global Scots who do so much to boost Scotland and its standing internationally.

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): Ireland's and Scotland's population sizes are comparable, but Ireland maintains nearly 90 diplomatic representations worldwide and Scotland has nine.

Despite the economic catastrophe of Brexit and the damage that has been done to international relationships following it, there is still a record number of foreign direct investment projects in Scotland, underpinning its position as the top-performing area in the United Kingdom outside London, which it has maintained for the ninth consecutive year. Does the cabinet secretary agree that that represents value for money, as is demonstrated in the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee's report on the value of our international offices?

Angus Robertson: The value of the international offices has been borne out over the years. We should not forget their genesis. The first international office, in Brussels, was hosted by the then Conservative UK Government and then by the Scottish Executive. It is now hosted by the Scottish Government, and additional offices have been added to the network. Those are civil service-staffed offices—sadly, they are not

embassies but representative offices—similar to those that are operated by Quebec, Flanders, the German Länder and many others internationally.

Clare Adamson's point about the value that they provide in the promotion of Scotland and the securing of inward investment and jobs is something that everybody in this Parliament should get behind. They do tremendous work, and it would be helpful if colleagues from all parties took the opportunity to commend them for their efforts.

Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Overseas Trips)

4. Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on what the total monetary cost has been, including in relation to travel, accommodation and staff and ministerial working time, of all overseas trips taken by the Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture since his appointment in 2021. (S6O-03816)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): As Mr Mountain knows, the Scottish Government proactively publishes details of all ministerial engagements, as per section 9.17 of the ministerial code. However, we do not hold details of staff and ministerial working time spent on overseas engagement. As I have said in relation to the Government's international network, I view such engagement as an essential part of doing the job of promoting Scotland internationally. It brings benefits to our economy, jobs, education and tourism—I could go on. I hope that Mr Mountain supports that.

Edward Mountain: I support openness. My question relates to around 20 visits, with 66 days abroad and more than 23 members of staff accompanying the cabinet secretary. I want to know—in pounds, shillings and pence—what it has cost the taxpayer for that to happen. I am surprised that the cabinet secretary is not prepared to give me that answer. I ask the question once more: what is the cost in pounds, shillings and pence?

Angus Robertson: I do not think that things are formatted in that way, but I am happy to write to Mr Mountain to point out where all the figures are listed. I am sure that he was not trying to suggest that, when I travel internationally, I am supported by a delegation of 23 members of staff on any individual visit. I am not.

I am responsible not only for the visits that I undertake but for the visits that colleagues across Government undertake. I make absolutely no apology for Scottish Government ministers

travelling internationally to promote inward investment, jobs, tourism and education—and, yes, that costs. I note for the *Official Report* that Mr Mountain is making a money sign. Yes, it costs to travel, and that is worthwhile. That is why every other Government in the world does it, and that is why the Scottish Government does it. Investment depends on it, jobs depend on it and our international relations depend on it. It provides value for money, and I am sorry that Mr Mountain cannot get behind it.

Arts Organisations (Current Challenges)

5. Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how it is engaging with local arts organisations to address any current challenges they face in maintaining their operations. (S6O-03817)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): I appreciate the challenges that are being faced by cultural organisations. The Scottish Government engages with local arts organisations across Scotland, directly through Creative Scotland and through membership organisations, and we are closely working with Creative Scotland and the wider culture sector to support, where possible, organisations that are facing immediate challenges. We will continue to do everything within our powers to ensure that the culture sector has in place the stable and supportive financial arrangements that it needs in order to fulfil its potential.

Douglas Lumsden: Last year, the Scottish National Party-led Aberdeen City Council shamefully slashed the funding to Big Noise Torry. To be fair, the Scottish Government stepped in to fund Sistema, though for only one year. What discussions has the cabinet secretary had with Sistema to put in place a long-term funding model to ensure that the brilliant work that Sistema does can continue long into the future?

Angus Robertson: I am in favour of the use of long-term funding models across the culture and arts sector. That is why the Government is committed to multiyear funding for cultural organisations and venues.

I am working hard within Government to make the case for that funding to be in place as part of the normal budgetary process. I very much hope that, if we are able to secure the funding—and I am confident that we can—to allow the roll-out of multiyear funding from the next financial year, parties and members right across the chamber will vote for the budget. Without the budget going through Parliament, the funding will not be in place for Sistema or anybody else. We need a budget to go through, and we need it to have the appropriate

allocation for culture. I hope that Mr Lumsden will vote for it and not just raise questions about it.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): In the light of reports that Glasgow's Centre for Contemporary Arts is closing its doors in December until March next year to restructure the organisation, citing funding challenges, what is the Scottish Government doing to ensure that the CCA's temporary closure does not become permanent and a further blow to an already beleaguered Sauchiehall Street?

Angus Robertson: I am concerned by any temporary difficulties that cultural organisations find themselves in, and there have been a number of such difficulties in recent years. When such difficulties have been raised directly either with me or with Creative Scotland, there have been interventions to ensure that the organisations can continue.

We are in the process of ensuring that funding is in place for the multiyear support of cultural organisations. I would be grateful if the member or any other colleague who hears of such issues arising between now and the budget process could raise them, because I am keen to ensure that we not only sustain the organisations that are in place but find the funding—the means—to give them a medium and long-term confident financial future.

However, I again make the point, which I have made to members of the Conservative Party, that that will require members across Parliament to support the budget. We cannot wish just for the ends—we have to wish for the means, too. If the funds are secured and included in the budget, which I am very focused on ensuring is the case, I hope that Mr Sweeney will join me in voting for it.

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): As has been touched on, the Chancellor of the Exchequer's budget announcement on 30 October will have a hugely significant bearing on the Scottish budget. What engagement has the cabinet secretary had with Creative Scotland to ensure that arts organisations are best placed to navigate the operational challenges presented by the timing of the United Kingdom budget announcement?

Angus Robertson: I appreciate the need for clarity from the culture sector in relation to the outcome of Creative Scotland's multiyear funding process. Indeed, I meet Creative Scotland regularly to discuss that matter. My last meeting with it was on 27 September, when I reiterated the Scottish Government's support for arts and the culture sector and the multiyear funding process.

I also explained that the Scottish Government can provide further financial clarity only once the Chancellor of the Exchequer has set out her

budget. I am making the strongest case possible for appropriate funding as we increase funding for culture and the arts in Scotland. I have no doubt that Audrey Nicoll will vote for that in the budget, and I hope that members across the chamber will do so, too.

People's Story Museum

6. Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions ministers have had with the City of Edinburgh Council regarding the proposed closure of Edinburgh's People's Story museum. (S6O-03818)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): I am saddened to hear about the temporary closure of the People's Story museum, which tells the important history of the lives of ordinary working people in Edinburgh, and I hope that it reopens as a priority. I also recognise the challenges that Scotland's museums face, which is why we are continuing to support the sector with £2.7 million of funds in 2024-25 to Museums Galleries Scotland, Scotland's national museums and galleries development body. I urge the City of Edinburgh Council to continue discussions with key stakeholders, including Museums Galleries Scotland, to see whether there is a way forward.

Miles Briggs: As the cabinet secretary is the constituency member, he will be aware of real concerns about the closure of the museum due to unplanned staffing issues and costs facing the council. We simply cannot allow such a brilliant collection of archive material celebrating the stories of the people of Edinburgh to be lost to the city and, I believe, to Scotland. Have the Scottish Government's culture services offered support to the council to help provide for the sustainable reopening of the museum? Will the cabinet secretary agree to visit the museum with me when it reopens, which I hope will be in December?

Angus Robertson: It has caused absolute consternation that the closure was announced before any consultation—frankly, it is shocking that a Labour-led council should do such a thing. I take the opportunity to pay tribute to the community campaigners—especially Jim Slaven and the city centre ward Scottish National Party councillor, Finlay McFarlane—who have been strongly making the case against the temporary closure by the Labour-led City of Edinburgh Council. Especially in this 900th anniversary year of Edinburgh, the People's Story and its important working-class history must be open to the public. That must be a priority.

My answer to the member's question is yes, the Scottish Government, through Museums Galleries Scotland, has been liaising with the City of

Edinburgh Council to look at ways in which a temporary closure can be lifted.

Foysoil Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): The news regarding the People's Story, which is Edinburgh's only museum dedicated to working-class history, is deeply disappointing. The public deserve to see history that represents them. Will the Scottish Government step in to protect this important facility? Does the cabinet secretary recognise that the Scottish Government's consistent underfunding of local authorities and museums will force more councils in Scotland to make tough decisions and damage local culture?

Angus Robertson: With the greatest respect to Mr Choudhury, that is buck passing by the Labour Party on the closure of the People's Story—I repeat, the People's Story—which was set up by the Labour Party and closed without any consultation. Mr Choudhury suggests that that is something to do with the Scottish Government, but it has nothing to do with the Scottish Government and everything to do with the wrong priorities of the Labour Party.

Yes, I have asked Museums Galleries Scotland to become involved, but it is through the work of the likes of Jim Slaven and Finlay McFarlane that the frankly shameful behaviour of the City of Edinburgh Council has been exposed, and through that alone. I believe that the temporary closure will have to be lifted, as it is absolutely unsustainable. We should be hearing apologies from Labour members rather than buck passing.

Strategic Partnership for Scotland's Festivals (Involvement of Scotland's Winter Festivals)

7. Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has to ensure that those delivering Scotland's winter festivals will be involved in the planned strategic partnership for Scotland's festivals. (S6O-03819)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): The strategic partnership for Scotland's festivals will seek the input of arts festivals of all sizes across Scotland. It will bring together arts festivals, public bodies and the wider culture sector with the aim of developing a strategic approach to how festivals are supported in their delivery and development. That will include consideration of how the Scottish Government's commitment to increase culture funding by £100 million by 2028-29 can uphold the role of festivals in the culture sector.

Delivery plans for the partnership are currently being worked up, but the Scottish Government's aim is to ensure that all interested stakeholders have opportunities to input into and shape its work.

Colin Smyth: I urge the cabinet secretary to include in his partnership representation from the Big Burns Supper in Dumfries. He will know that, sadly, last year, the Big Burns Supper festival in Dumfries had to be cancelled when the Scottish Government ended the winter festival fund. The festival is back this year on a smaller scale—in fact, I invite the cabinet secretary to attend what will be a great weekend. Does the cabinet secretary agree that sustaining the Big Burns Supper could play a huge part in realising the enormous positive economic impact that Burns can have in the South Scotland economy?

Angus Robertson: I totally agree on the importance of Burns night and the opportunity to celebrate it domestically and internationally. I think that Mr Smyth is aware that I wrote an open letter to the culture sector in relation to festivals, and I will see whether I have been contacted by the festival that he has named. If he wishes to forward to me any correspondence that he has on that, I will look closely at it.

A stakeholder meeting in relation to the festivals partnership was held this week, at which the issue of winter festivals was a subject of discussion. I give a commitment to the member that I view the issue as important. Whether it be in relation to the event that he has mentioned or any other event that could benefit from consideration with regard to support for festivals, I would be pleased if constituency members and others raised issues with me directly.

Lebanon (Humanitarian Assistance)

8. **Alex Rowley:** To ask the Scottish Government, in relation to humanitarian aid funding through its humanitarian emergency fund, what consideration it is giving to supporting the provision of humanitarian assistance in Lebanon. (S6O-03820)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): The Scottish Government maintains a £1 million per year humanitarian emergency fund to respond to humanitarian crises globally. Decisions on which emergencies to activate the fund for are based on the recommendations of a panel of eight leading humanitarian non-governmental organisations in Scotland.

As yet, we have not received a request from the humanitarian emergency fund panel to activate the fund in relation to the Lebanon crisis. However, we are extremely concerned about the rapidly increasing violence in the middle east, the high level of civilian casualties and the catastrophic humanitarian situation. We continue to call for an immediate ceasefire on all sides and an increase in the level of humanitarian aid.

Alex Rowley: People up and down Scotland are watching in absolute horror the human pain, human misery and human loss that hundreds of thousands of men, women and children are experiencing across the middle east. Although we recognise the limitations of a devolved Administration, what more can the Scottish Government do to help in this humanitarian crisis and be a strong voice for peace?

Angus Robertson: I thank Alex Rowley for his encouragement to try to do as much as we can. He is absolutely right that we are limited—sadly, we are not responsible for foreign affairs. We are responsible for our external relations, especially in relation to our devolved functions. We have an international development policy as well as a humanitarian policy, and I have tried to explain the mechanics of how that works. I have not yet had a call in that respect in relation to Lebanon, but it might well come. The situation has been developing in recent weeks; perhaps such a call will be made in the weeks to come, and I will look very closely at that.

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

Justice and Home Affairs

Female Custodial Estate

1. **Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what progress is being made in reforming the female custodial estate. (S6O-03821)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): Over the past two years, the Scottish Government has opened His Majesty's Prison and Young Offender Institution Stirling for women and the Bella and Liliacs community custody units, with Bella celebrating its second anniversary this week.

The community custody units for women are the first of their kind in the United Kingdom. Investment in those facilities demonstrates our commitment to compassionate care for women in custody, which acknowledges experience of trauma and adversity and supports successful transitions back to the community, which can reduce reoffending.

Recent inspectorate reports commended both community custody units for their success in delivering a safe, stable and trauma-informed service, whereas HMP and YOI Stirling is described as:

“making confident strides towards being world leading in the care and support of vulnerable women”.

Michael Matheson: I welcome that response, particularly around the development of the community custody units, although they have taken a bit longer than had been anticipated when the plan was originally set out.

Given that they are a new innovation, and that they have drawn significant international interest, will the cabinet secretary set out what form of monitoring and evaluation has been undertaken of the centres? As that process is taken forward, when will the evaluations be published, in order for us to see the level of progress that has been made with the community custody units?

The cabinet secretary will be aware that last week, there were 370 women in custody in Scotland, 36 per cent of whom were on remand. What action is being taken to reduce the number of prisoners in our custodial estate who are on remand?

Angela Constance: I should acknowledge that it was Mr Matheson who introduced the “Strategy for Women in Custody: 2021-25” to Parliament a number of years ago. It is imperative that we continue to build on the legacy of the Angiolini commission, and on the progress that has been made in providing more compassionate care that both recognises and responds to the adversity that is so often experienced by women who come into contact with the criminal justice system.

It is imperative that that progress is evaluated. Teresa Medhurst, the chief executive of the Scottish Prison Service, has recently indicated that although that evaluation is at an early stage, the signs are very encouraging. There is international interest in the community custody units for women, which were established according to the very best international practice.

The Government will continue to invest in alternatives to remand; there is a whole suite of activity in that regard. For example, specific investment has been allocated to local authorities towards providing bail support for women, with a view to reducing the numbers of those on remand.

Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con): The previous chief inspector of prisons for Scotland, Wendy Sinclair-Gieben, warned of “degrading”, “disproportionate” and “unnecessary” body searches being carried out on women at HMP Stirling. She also raised that concern about the Bella community custody unit in Dundee and the Lilas CCU. She warned that those searches risked “re-traumatising” vulnerable women, and advised that they should be stopped. Can the cabinet secretary provide an update on the use of that practice?

Angela Constance: I have discussed the matter on a number of occasions with the previous prison inspector and with the chief executive of the Scottish Prison Service. It is important to acknowledge that Wendy Sinclair-Gieben stated that there are legitimate reasons for body searching when it is based on robust intelligence or reasonable grounds. Nevertheless, it is imperative that, where possible, we reduce body searching across the estate. The use of body scanners in various establishments reduces the need for physical searching.

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): The opening of the new women’s custody units was very welcome. Last year, the Bella centre was at 50 per cent occupancy, and the Liliias centre was at 33 per cent occupancy. However, in February this year, the cabinet secretary told me that the assessment criteria had been reviewed and that there had been an increase to two thirds occupancy. Are those units now being fully used? Does the cabinet secretary agree that it is important that those facilities are fully utilised?

Angela Constance: I absolutely agree that those facilities should be fully utilised. That means that women have to have the opportunity to progress to the prison system, which can be hindered due to a large population.

I will, if I can, provide the member with some reassurance: occupancy of HMP and YOI Stirling is at 90 per cent, occupancy of the Liliias unit is at 92 per cent, and occupancy of the Bella unit is at 70 per cent.

Food Crime

2. Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the justice secretary has had with Police Scotland and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service regarding their role in addressing food crime, in light of reports of counterfeit vodka being seized in the Central Scotland region. (S6O-03822)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): That particular investigation is being led by Food Standards Scotland as a member of the multi-agency tasking and delivery board. That board, which operates out of the Scottish crime campus, comprises a range of law enforcement agencies, including Police Scotland, the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service and Trading Standards Scotland, and enables them to share intelligence on new and emerging threats, and to pool resources to disrupt those threats and reduce the harm that they cause.

It plays a major role in delivering the detect and disrupt strands of Scotland’s serious organised

crime strategy. It is vital to disrupt such crimes and activities. I am aware that with food and drink, there is a risk to public health, so I would urge everyone not to buy or consume such goods and to report instances to Police Scotland or to Food Standards Scotland.

Monica Lennon: I thank the cabinet secretary for that important public health message, and I thank the organisations that have been involved in the measures that she described. However, the matter is really concerning. In one shop in Coatbridge, 40 bottles of fake vodka were seized. More than 240 bottles in total have been confiscated in the central belt alone.

There is a real workforce issue. Food Standards Scotland is under pressure and we do not have enough trading standards officers. What discussions are taking place across Government to ensure that we have the right workforce? What is being done to stop those criminal gangs?

I ask the cabinet secretary to say something brief about toxicology. Is she confident that there are no delays in that?

Angela Constance: I make the member aware that I, along with the Lord Advocate, chair the serious organised crime task force, which has a pivotal role in identifying the threats from, and steps to disrupt, serious organised crime in all its forms.

Food Standards Scotland issued a warning on 30 August with respect to counterfeit alcohol. That was based on lab results in which isopropyl, which is harmful if consumed, was found in alcohol. I will follow up with the member on the more detailed points that she raises about toxicology.

I am confident of Food Standards Scotland's capacity and capability to investigate food crime. It is a specialist reporting agency and is empowered to report crimes and offences directly to the Crown Office. Various other partners are involved, whether through the work of the crime campus at Gartcosh or Food Standards Scotland's engagement with all 32 local authorities, bearing in mind that it works with all local authorities with respect to intelligence gathering.

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): The Criminal Justice Committee recently heard from Food Standards Scotland about the close work that it undertakes with agencies such as the Crown Office and Police Scotland. Indeed, I was on a webinar at lunchtime with people from Food Standards Scotland, who were particularly complimentary about the agency's relationship with the Crown Office. Will the cabinet secretary further outline how those relationships work, their importance in protecting public health and businesses from contaminated

and counterfeit products and how the activities that we are discussing can be disrupted?

Angela Constance: The relationship between Food Standards Scotland and law enforcement is critical. As I mentioned, Food Standards Scotland is a member of the multi-agency tasking and delivery board, which is a forum that it can use to report food crime-related matters with a serious organised crime focus so that a consistent partnership approach is taken and appropriate support is provided if necessary.

Food Standards Scotland also recently chaired a working group meeting with relevant partner agencies, including Police Scotland and the Crown Office, to focus on the investigation into the contamination of food and drink.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Questions 3 and 4 were not lodged. I call Sue Webber for question 5.

Rape and Sexual Assault Victims (Support)

5. **Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con):** It is just as well that I was paying attention, Presiding Officer.

To ask the Scottish Government what arrangements it has in place to ensure that victims of rape and sexual assault can always access the support that they need to deal with trauma. (S6O-03825)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): We are investing record levels of funding in our front-line services to support victims and survivors of rape and sexual assault, including more than £5 million annually for the rape crisis network, through our delivering equally safe fund. The Scottish Government is committed to sustaining our support for the fund, which includes funding for rape crisis centres, and we will pursue that commitment through the budget process.

Sue Webber: The trauma of vulnerable victims goes beyond the courts and the justice system. Women are self-excluding themselves from rape crisis centres across the country because a number of the centres are still not clear about their single-sex policy. Despite that, Ms Brindley, who has presided over the mess, is clinging on and trying to save her own skin rather than doing the decent thing and allowing rape crisis services to start again under new leadership. Does the cabinet secretary agree that, if we are genuine in our endeavours to restore rape victims' confidence in rape crisis centres, it is time for Ms Brindley to leave her role now?

Angela Constance: It is not for me to comment on the retention and recruitment policies of independent charities.

However, I agree with Ms Webber that people who have experienced rape, sexual assault or childhood sexual abuse have suffered the gravest violation of their human rights, so it is imperative that they are able to access the right service at the right time that meets their individual needs. I reiterate what Ms Stewart, the Minister for Equalities, said a few weeks ago: the Government upholds and adheres to the Equality Act 2010, which protects single-sex spaces, and we support the Equality and Human Rights Commission, which is the regulator for the 2010 act.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): I was pleased to see the Scottish Government's response to the victim notification scheme review today. Cabinet secretary, can you provide the timelines that you are working in order to make the much-needed reforms?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Always speak through the chair.

Angela Constance: The review made a number of recommendations on all aspects of the victim notification scheme, and we agree with the majority of them. Implementation will take place through a mixture of primary legislation, secondary legislation and administrative changes. We want work on the reforms to take place as quickly as possible, and we intend to take forward the recommendations that need primary legislation as part of the Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill, which is currently at stage 2. Other recommendations on the victim notification scheme will be taken forward in tandem, in collaboration with justice partners and victim support organisations, so that we can make changes to the system as a whole. We will take a joined-up approach with justice partners and victim support organisations to deliver the reforms.

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I have met numerous organisations that provide support and advice to survivors in my region, including the Rape and Sexual Abuse Service Highland—RASASH—and the Compass Centre in Shetland. Personally, I know just how important it is that victims are able to access the type of support that is right for them and that they do not feel pressured by others to react in a certain way. Will the cabinet secretary tell us more about what the Scottish Government is doing to ensure that rural and island organisations can continue to provide the safe space that a victim of gender-based violence might need?

Angela Constance: The equally safe strategy recognises that women in small rural or island communities can face particular challenges and that abuse can be even more hidden in those areas than it can be in urban areas. That is why we continue to fund vital specialist support across all parts of Scotland—including, importantly, in

rural and island communities—through the delivering equally safe fund. For example, more than £2 million of the £19 million that we are providing this year is going to projects that support women in our island communities.

Legal Aid Solicitors

6. Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to address the reported reduction in the number of legal aid solicitors. (S6O-03826)

The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Siobhian Brown): The Scottish Government has taken significant steps to assist legal aid providers, including increasing legal aid fees by more than 25 per cent since 2019 and providing £1 million of funding to establish 40 traineeships in legal aid firms during 2021.

The number of legal aid solicitors can fluctuate for a variety of reasons, and the issue of solicitor availability is being explored by the Scottish Legal Aid Board, which is undertaking comprehensive analysis that will look in detail at legal aid activity at a geographical and subject matter level. We will continue to work with the legal profession and others to identify measures to improve and reform Scotland's legal aid system.

Sharon Dowey: More than 400 solicitors have withdrawn from legal aid duty plans in the past three years, and entire towns and cities are now lacking solicitors on police station or court duty. That has raised concerns, in particular from the Law Society of Scotland, about the creation of legal aid deserts in rural communities. Given that those shortages could leave vulnerable people without access to justice, what immediate action will the Scottish Government take to prevent rural communities from becoming legal aid deserts?

Siobhian Brown: It is important to note that court and police station duty numbers are not the same as the total number of solicitors who are providing criminal legal aid. As the member might know, the Scottish Government cannot compel private solicitors to undertake work. However, I am committed to working with the legal profession to find solutions to bring forward legal aid reform.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): As members will be aware, we are losing lawyers from the defence profession because we are unable to get a longer-term sustainable plan for the retention of much-needed lawyers across Scotland. Will the minister elaborate on whether there is a wholesale plan for the retention of those solicitors, including what progress has been made since 2021 on the traineeship that has to be part of such a plan? Maybe it is time to agree that an annual uprating of legal aid fees might end the constant battle with the legal aid profession. Notwithstanding what the

Government has done already, a regular increase would at least help to retain some of that profession.

Siobhian Brown: As the member knows, the “Vision for Justice in Scotland” is a three-year delivery plan that contains action to reform the legal aid system and to engage with key stakeholders to inform and shape future legislative proposals. Officials will take part in a series of stakeholder engagement sessions on legal aid reform in the coming months.

The Scottish Government is liaising with the Law Society of Scotland to evaluate the traineeship system that we funded a year or two ago.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): As has been suggested, the Scottish Legal Aid Board has estimated that 439 private solicitors will have been withdrawn from legal aid court duty between 2021 and 2023. In Orkney, there is now no duty solicitor working on court and police station duty plans. As I have repeatedly said over the years, rural and island communities are particularly vulnerable to becoming legal aid deserts, as has been suggested. Does the minister acknowledge that risk? If so, what specific targeted steps is the Government taking to ensure that those who live in communities such as the one that I represent have proper and equitable access to justice?

Siobhian Brown: Yes, I do acknowledge that risk. As I said in my earlier answer, the Scottish Legal Aid Board is doing comprehensive analysis to look at the detail of legal aid activity at a geographical and subject matter level and to see how it can be improved.

The legal aid system is a national one and it is flexible enough to allow services to be delivered by solicitors around the country to people in other parts of the country. There are numerous ways in which access to solicitors can be facilitated remotely, and funding is available to allow solicitors to travel to rural and remote parts of the country. However, as I have said before, the Scottish Government cannot compel private solicitors to take on work.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 7 has not been lodged.

Civil Justice (Access to Advice and Advocacy)

8. **Lorna Slater (Lothian) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government how it will ensure access to advice and advocacy for civil justice issues, especially for people in rural and island communities, in light of the reported recent reduction in funding for the early resolution and advice programme. (S6O-03828)

The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Siobhian Brown): The Scottish Government is continuing to fund the early resolution and advice programme with just over £2 million this year for 16 projects in the third sector across Scotland, including rural and island communities. Project funding will continue to be provided to agencies in the Highlands and Islands until March 2025, focusing on advice related to the housing emergency and any associated debt-related issues that result from that. That includes funding for projects managed by the citizens advice bureaux in Orkney, Aness, Moray, Nairn and across Argyll and Bute.

In addition, the Scottish Government has allocated more than £12 million this year for the provision of free income-maximisation support, welfare and debt advice.

Lorna Slater: Domestic violence has serious and long-lasting consequences for victims’ health and wellbeing. The costs of the failure to protect, which go further than financial and budgetary issues, are borne by women and children across Scotland, and those who live in rural areas suffer exponentially as a result of a lack of readily available, competent legal advice and services. People in Glasgow are able to benefit from the help of organisations such as the Govan Law Centre. Will the Scottish Government commit to helping to establish and support similar charitable organisations that are able to provide legal aid-funded services here in Lothian and, moreover, across Scotland, especially in our towns, villages and island communities?

Siobhian Brown: We are working closely with other portfolio areas in the Scottish Government to give particular consideration to how more targeted and planned interventions can support user need, align and identify Government priorities, and assist legal aid in being rightly recognised as an invaluable public service, so that more targeted provision in the current year could improve access to legally aided services in certain geographical areas or for groups with specific legal needs, such as victims of domestic abuse or people who are facing housing issues, especially now that the moratorium on evictions has ended.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio question time. There will be a short pause before we move on to the next item of business to allow front-bench teams to change position, should they so wish.

Budget Priorities 2025-26

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-14825, in the name of Ross Greer, on budget priorities 2025-26. I invite members who wish to participate in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons as soon as possible.

14:52

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): We are back to being a Parliament of minorities, which means that, for a budget to pass—or, indeed, for any parliamentary business to be agreed to—cooperation and compromise will be required. That is not a new challenge for this Parliament. In the previous session and in a number of other previous sessions, compromise has been required and minority government has been the order of the day.

However, minority government is a greater challenge today because Scotland is in a financial crisis. Our public finances are simply not sustainable. It is well timed that this debate comes at the start of this month and that, at the end of the month, we will have a Government debate on fiscal sustainability, which was requested by the Finance and Public Administration Committee.

The Green motion does not pretend that devolution is enough: devolution does not give us all the powers that we need to achieve our goals for Scotland. Under the powers of devolution, we cannot eradicate child poverty, nor can we completely take the required action against the climate emergency.

However, at the same time, we cannot afford to sit on our hands. It is of no comfort to people at the sharp end for us to explain the limits of the Scotland Act 2012 or the constraints of the fiscal framework. That does not help those who are suffering as a result of cuts to public services or who are suffering the effects of climate breakdown. We have a moral responsibility.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Would Mr Greer like to reflect on the fact that, under the fiscal framework and the Barnett formula, we in Scotland have around 20 per cent more to spend per head of population than the United Kingdom average, yet many outcomes in Scotland are poorer than they are south of the border? Why does he think that is?

Ross Greer: I am grateful for that intervention. There is a range of explanations for those outcomes. First and foremost, although we have greater spending per head, we are not in charge of all the levers that affect the day-to-day lives of people in Scotland. Most obviously, we are not in

charge of the vast majority of the social security system. If Mr Fraser's party had not done such immense damage to that system over the previous 14 years, there would be far fewer people in Scotland living in poverty with worse public health outcomes.

Greens want more public spending, but we will be honest about where we think that the money for that can come from and how it can be raised. Unsurprisingly, we would take funding from the road-building and motorway expansion budgets and put it into housing and climate action, and we would raise more from those who can afford it, such as the supermarkets and people who travel by private jet.

The current balance of tax, spend and the block grant is not sustainable. We might all have different reasons for believing that that is the case, but I think that we all agree that the current balance is not sustainable. Addressing that is a shared responsibility—it is not just the Scottish Government's or the Scottish National Party's responsibility.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): Ross Greer is right about sustainability and right to think about additional levies. However, I do not think that the levies that he has talked about, such as those for supermarkets, are enough to cover that sustainability. What we need is faster wage growth than the UK average, because that is what is baked into the fiscal framework. Would he agree with that point or reflect on it?

Ross Greer: I am grateful for that intervention, because it takes me to a point that I am about to touch on. Before I get to it, I want to round off the shared responsibility point. All parties in the Parliament have voted for budgets at some point in the past 25 years and all parties have suggested areas of spending that we have seen as priorities. We therefore need to see getting devolved finances back on a sustainable footing as a shared responsibility.

I respect the honesty of those who come here and say that they would simply cut their way to balance. It would be immensely destructive and I would oppose it, but there is an honesty to that, when there is no honesty to what we have seen over recent years. Members come here to demand huge amounts of additional spending but suggest no tax rises or cuts in other areas.

On Daniel Johnson's point, I do not think that it is an either/or between growing and strengthening our tax base and increasing taxes to raise revenue right now. I point to the approach that has been taken in the United States, which recognises that a Government needs to spend more to invest in and strengthen the economy. The Inflation Reduction Act there has been a far more effective way to

recover from the global economic turmoil of the past few years than the approach that most European Governments have taken.

The Scottish Greens have already proposed a range of revenue-raising and savings options. For example, although we support tax support for small businesses, a quarter of a billion pounds every year is spent on the small business bonus scheme, from which the Government's own evaluation could find no evidence of positive economic outcomes. Some of that money—although it is a small amount—goes to the shooting estates that the wealthy elite owns and some of it goes to businesses that are anything but small. Reform in that area would present a savings option.

The grants that are given to arms companies are another small but obvious example. A year into Israel's genocide in Gaza, it is appalling that the Scottish Government's enterprise agencies are still giving public money to those companies.

On the supermarket levy that I mentioned, at the moment our public services are under significant strain as a result of the harm that is done by alcohol and tobacco, but the supermarkets that make such a substantial profit from them are not being taxed proportionately. The private jet tax that the Greens have been pushing over recent weeks—albeit that we would need to see movement from the UK Government on subsidy control—is another example.

We would also, as I mentioned, cut motorway expansion. Our motion makes the point about policy coherence. It is not right—it is not effective—to spend money on increasing and cutting emissions at the same time. We should move the money that is currently spent on projects that increase emissions into those that would actually cut them. Another example of that would be the fact that the Government gives money to both arms dealers and the emergency appeals that charities have to launch to deal with the consequences of countries such as Yemen being bombed to rubble.

We agree with the Scottish Government's amendment. The UK Conservative fiscal rules have failed and we would like the new Labour Government to abandon them—in particular, in relation to capital and the ability to invest in the public infrastructure that is required for a strong economy.

On the Conservative amendment, I am glad to see Murdo Fraser here. I was hoping that his colleagues were checking that he was okay when I saw his amendment yesterday—I was expecting him to come in wearing a sandwich board and shouting, "Doom is nigh!" It is such an extreme

amendment that I was worried that Fergus Ewing had helped him to write it. [*Laughter.*]

The Labour amendment, on the other hand, could have been written by the Conservative Party just a few months ago, when it was in charge of the UK Government. There is a challenge for Labour here. Where is the vision? Where is the change on offer?

What is key to the Greens' motion is empowerment of local government through the budget—the more local government raises, the less we must haggle annually here over the general revenue grant.

The visitor and workplace parking levies are examples of legislative change that came about as a result of previous budget agreements.

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): [*Made a request to intervene.*]

Ross Greer: I am sorry, but I will not be able to take Katy Clark's intervention, because I am just closing.

The Greens want to see progress big and small. We want, for example, a revaluation of the rates for council tax, but we also want the ability to set parking fines to be devolved to councils, which we need to start seeing as an equal tier of government.

There are some direct budget choices and others that—I will be quite honest—we are simply using as a point of leverage with the Government.

We are proud of our previous budget agreements that delivered free bus travel for under-22s; £1.5 billion of additional income for public services; an increase to the additional dwelling supplement; record spending on walking, wheeling and cycling; the nature restoration fund; the removal of peak rail fares; and more.

The challenge for the Scottish Government this year will not just be around specific proposals but around its ability to provide trust and good faith to any other party in the Parliament that it needs to deal with that what is agreed in the budget is what will be delivered. Agreement is possible, but the challenge for the Scottish Government is for it to prove that it is able and willing to deliver it.

I move,

That the Parliament notes that the fiscal levers that are currently available to the Scottish Government are inadequate to fully protect public services and communities from UK Government austerity and economic turmoil, but that the Scottish Government must use every power at its disposal to address the urgent social, economic and environmental challenges that Scotland faces, and calls, therefore, on the Scottish Government to explore all avenues to fiscal sustainability, including seeking opportunities for further powers, such as those over levies and charges, to be devolved to local government for 2025-

26, creating new powers, such as a cruise ship levy, exploring how a carbon emissions land tax and a power of general competence could be delivered and ensuring the most effective and progressive use of existing tax powers and tax reliefs and that spending does not undermine the core missions of tackling child poverty and the climate emergency.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: As ever with these debates, there is very limited time in hand, so interventions will have to be accommodated largely within the speaking allocations.

15:00

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Shona Robison): I thank the Scottish Green Party for lodging the motion. It is absolutely right that the fiscal levers that are currently available to the Scottish Government are inadequate. We have all felt the impacts of the high inflation, austerity and economic turmoil of the previous UK Government, and our public services and communities have borne the brunt.

We have done our best to mitigate those impacts, but we are doing so without the full set of fiscal powers that other countries have. My amendment adds to the Scottish Greens' motion and calls on the UK Government to scrap the fiscal rules of the previous Government. We want new fiscal rules that enable greater investment to support public services on the transition to net zero.

Last week, I met the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and raised the need for investment in public services and infrastructure in the UK budget. I pointed out the Treasury's finding that departmental budgets had not been reset to account for inflation, which means that they are £15 billion lower this year in real terms than 2021 spending plans. If we had our share of that, I would not have needed to make the spending reductions that I announced last month.

I want to work with the UK Government to address the challenges and, of course, to put our public finances on a more sustainable footing. The Chancellor of the Exchequer's commitment to multiyear budgets will help, but it is not sufficient: we need a wider range of fiscal tools to manage our budget.

Daniel Johnson: The cabinet secretary is right to talk about fiscal sustainability. What are her reflections on the Scottish Fiscal Commission's observation about the £600 million performance gap, and is the Scottish Government focusing on addressing that?

Shona Robison: The Scottish Fiscal Commission also said that there is "considerable uncertainty" about the resources that will be coming to the Scottish Government from the UK

Government, and that uncertainty adds to the fiscal constraints that we have. Moving to multiyear budgets absolutely helps us collectively to have a line of sight on resource and capital and on how we can get to a more sustainable position while investing in public services.

Ross Greer spoke about devolving further powers to local government to provide greater revenue-raising abilities, and I am keen to do so. We have already made significant progress on delivering a fiscal framework with local government, and we have delivered on our commitment to enable councils to apply a premium of up to 100 per cent on council tax rates for second homes from 1 April this year.

Parliament has also passed legislation to give councils the power to introduce a visitor levy in their area to support investment in the visitor economy. The programme for government makes it clear that we will intensify work on designing a potential cruise ship levy, so we will engage with local authorities and stakeholders over the coming months to develop more detailed proposals.

Ross Greer: I would appreciate it if the cabinet secretary could confirm that it is still the Scottish Government's intention to deliver a cruise ship levy by the end of this parliamentary session.

Shona Robison: Yes—subject to all the consultation that we need in order to take on board stakeholders' views of the cruise ship levy. It is important that we get that right, but we are keen to move forward as quickly as we can.

We are also carefully considering the responses to "Infrastructure Levy for Scotland—Discussion Paper", which we published in June. If that levy is taken forward, it will provide local authorities with an additional mechanism to secure developer contributions to fund infrastructure in their area. Councils will also be able to decide whether to implement a workplace parking levy, depending on local circumstances.

We will continue to evolve the joint work on the fiscal framework, and I am happy to discuss with members from across the chamber further proposals to strengthen the powers of local government.

I have said that the Scottish budget for next year will be very challenging, and the decisions that the Chancellor of the Exchequer takes on 30 October will play a big role in determining our funding. Our budget will be focused on delivering the priorities that the First Minister set out in the programme for government. We are spending £134 million this year to mitigate the worst of the UK Government's damaging welfare policies. If the chancellor changes course on those, we will have more money for further action on those priorities. I had a very valuable meeting with the Finance and Public

Administration Committee yesterday as it looked ahead to the Scottish budget. I welcome further engagement across the chamber.

The motion calls on the Scottish Government to use

“every power at its disposal to address the urgent social, economic and environmental challenges that Scotland faces”.

That is what we are doing, but we can go only so far with our current powers. We need change from the new UK Government. It needs to increase funding for public services, invest in infrastructure to support our economy and deliver our net zero ambitions, and end the dreadful social security policies of the previous Government. It needs new fiscal rules that focus on public sector net worth, thereby allowing greater investment in the fabric of the country. Those are the changes that are needed to help us to address the challenges that we face. If the UK Government is up for it, we will work together to achieve that.

I move amendment to motion S6M-14825.3, to insert at end:

“, and calls on the UK Labour administration to scrap the fiscal rules of the former UK Conservative administration.”

15:06

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I do not think that I have ever seen a motion so full of so much nonsense as Ross Greer’s. Let me try to unpick exactly where the Greens are in error—although I have only four minutes, so that will be a great challenge. We should remember that the Green Party is fundamentally hostile to economic growth and wealth creation, so everything that it says needs to be seen in that context.

The motion starts by decrying the fiscal levers that are available to the Scottish Government. Let us remind the Green Party that the Scottish Parliament is one of the most powerful sub-state legislatures in the world in its power to make laws and its fiscal powers. Indeed, that is how it is seen in federal states, such as Germany. The Länder look jealously at the Parliament’s fiscal powers, as anybody who has visited Germany would know—I say that as the Minister for Public Finance sits laughing on the front bench.

Ross Greer: Will the member take an intervention?

Murdo Fraser: Of course.

Ross Greer: I am very grateful to Mr Fraser for taking the intervention. I am interested in his thoughts on the question that I posed. Does he believe that the Parliament is powerful enough to eradicate child poverty in Scotland, or does he

acknowledge that that would require the co-operation of both Governments?

Murdo Fraser: The Parliament has the most generous block grant in the history of devolution. The block grant has nearly doubled in real terms since the Parliament was established. As I pointed out to Ross Greer, per head of population, we have 20 per cent more to spend than is the equivalent across the UK. The Parliament has vast resources. The questions that Ross Greer should be asking are: why is that money not being properly spent, and why is so much of that money being wasted, given that the outcomes here are poorer than in other parts of the UK?

The Parliament has power over non-savings, non-dividend income tax and can change bands and rates completely. It has power over land and buildings transaction tax, aggregates tax, non-domestic rates and council tax. It even has the power to create new taxes. It is therefore nonsensical to say that the powers do not exist. We criticise the Scottish Government for using them to make the wrong choices. A case in point is the national care service, which our amendment refers to. Money is being wasted on bureaucracy that should instead be spent on front-line services.

We have seen years of economic and fiscal mismanagement by the SNP in government—propped up by the Greens in government for a number of years—which has led to £2.7 billion of taxpayers’ money being wasted over this parliamentary session.

Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Murdo Fraser: I have only four minutes, and I have a lot more to say. I am sorry.

Scotland is forecast to have the fifth-lowest gross domestic product growth of any UK region. We lag behind the rest of the UK in growth and have done so for the past decade. The SNP’s failure to grow our economy has cost the Scottish budget, to date, £624 million, according to a calculation that was done not by the Scottish Conservatives but by the Scottish Fiscal Commission. Underpinning all that, in Scotland, we pay more tax than the rest of the UK. Those decisions are having a negative impact on our ability to grow the economy. I have, many times in this Parliament, referred to the attitude of Scottish businesses towards the tax differential. In order to attract staff, many of them now have to offer a wage premium to take account of our higher taxes.

In addition, the Greens’ destructive approach to housing has damaged investment confidence and driven away hundreds of millions of pounds of investment, which has gone elsewhere. Thanks to the Greens’ policies on that sector, it is no wonder that we have a housing crisis.

Instead of introducing new taxes and widening the tax gap with the rest of the UK, the Scottish Government should go in the opposite direction. It should ignore the economic and fiscal illiteracy that the Scottish Greens propose and instead use its extensive and generous fiscal powers to deliver a budget later this year that will prioritise economic growth and reduce the tax gap with the rest of the UK. The Greens will not like that budget, but the rest of Scotland will be thankful for it.

I am pleased to move amendment S6M-14825.2, to leave out from “notes” to end and insert:

“agrees that the fiscal levers currently available to the Scottish Government are more than adequate to deliver the economic growth that is vital to sustain public services; recognises that the current fiscal settlement, provided by the former UK Conservative administration, is the most generous on record, and that the Scottish Government has failed to properly utilise the monies allocated to it, by instead choosing to prioritise wasteful projects, such as the National Care Service; notes that the Scottish Government’s financial incompetence, which was exacerbated by the former Bute House Agreement with the Scottish Green Party, has resulted in Scotland becoming a high-tax, low-growth economy that has lost the confidence of the business sector and has resulted in severe public sector spending cuts to fix the Scottish Government’s financial black hole, and urges the Scottish Government to show some common sense and ignore the economic and financial illiteracy proposed by the Scottish Green Party, which proposes yet more burdensome taxation and anti-growth regulations, and to use the generous fiscal powers that it already has to deliver a Budget that prioritises economic growth and provides for all of Scotland.”

15:10

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): I agree with Ross Greer that it is certainly a good thing that we are going to have the long-awaited fiscal sustainability debate. There are real challenges in our public finances in Scotland that we need to get to grips with. In eight weeks’ time, the cabinet secretary will be on her feet in the Parliament to announce the budget for the coming financial year—or, more likely, the budget for the following six months.

There are significant pressures on the public finances, not least the pressure that is applied by an incompetent Government that has been wasteful with taxpayers’ money and has refused to plan for the future. However, I am sorry to say that the measures that the Scottish Greens set out today—some of which are certainly worthy of investigation—will not be able to close the gap in the coming budget.

Last week, the Parliament passed the Aggregates Tax and Devolved Taxes Administration (Scotland) Bill, and the Scottish Government plans to introduce the Scottish aggregates tax on 1 April 2026—a decade on from the Scotland Act 2016, in which the power to

introduce that tax was devolved. It has taken 10 years to devolve a tax that, to a large extent, mirrors a pre-existing one.

A range of independent experts say that they are sick and tired of the idle talk of wealth taxes. They want Government to get on and reform the wealth tax that we already have—the council tax. However, the SNP has spent 17 years not reforming the council tax.

Last year, Professor David Bell pointed out that it had taken

“six years to implement social security in Scotland.”—*[Official Report, Finance and Public Administration Committee, 19 September 2023; c 7.]*

That is giving people money, not taking money away.

Ross Greer: I could not agree more with Mr Marra on his frustration with the failure to reform the council tax. Can he clarify Labour’s position on reforming the council tax? Would his party at least support revaluation? Would it go further? Does Labour believe that the tax should be replaced outright?

Michael Marra: Over the past decade, the Labour Party has brought forward a range of measures to reform council tax, but we have not found willing partners in this chamber. We are entirely open to conversations with the Greens, the SNP, the Conservatives and anybody else about how we make those proposals work. We know that reform has to happen, and we should get on with it. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Minister!

Michael Marra: Presiding Officer, given some of the cabinet secretary’s comments, you can understand why I am sceptical as to whether a shopping list of additional levies will be the silver bullet for the budget.

The Greens are right to point to the unholy mess that the SNP has made of Scotland’s finances: £5 billion lost to waste; the failure to grow our economy, leaving us £8.5 billion poorer; and nearly half a billion pounds of Scotland’s money squandered on a black hole, rather than invested in our nation’s future. There have been three consecutive years of emergency budget statements that announce swingeing in-year cuts across the board, but it does not have to be that way.

After 17 years, we might think that the SNP would have got to grips with the process, but, if anything, it is getting worse. Part of the problem is how opaque the budget is. A responsible Government would surely comply with its agreement with the Scottish Fiscal Commission to supply the data that is needed for forecasts, but,

for two consecutive years, the SNP has failed to provide to the Scottish Fiscal Commission such fundamental information as a public sector pay policy. At yesterday's Finance and Public Administration Committee meeting, the cabinet secretary still refused to say whether she would supply a pay policy for this year's budget, despite the fact that pay accounts for more than half the total budget. Surely that is something that ought to be budgeted for. The levels of incompetence are truly shocking.

Of course, it was only yesterday that the cabinet secretary confirmed the assumptions that she had made on pay in last year's budget—a £375 million understating of the cost. It is no wonder that we ended up with £1 billion of emergency crisis cuts in a year, and no wonder that the likes of the Fraser of Allander Institute, the Institute for Fiscal Studies and Audit Scotland have criticised the Scottish Government for its lack of transparency around budgets.

This incompetent Government has well and truly lost its way. Worse still, it has lost control of the public finances, meaning that ordinary Scots will pay the price as they pay more and get less.

I move amendment S6M-14825.1, to leave out from "notes" to end and insert:

"understands that tackling the social, economic and environmental challenges that Scotland faces and delivering sustainable funding for public services is only possible through delivering sustainable economic growth and an economy that works for everyone in Scotland; recognises the importance of the UK Government's commitment to fix the foundations of the economy, and understands that Scotland will benefit from this approach; understands that the Scottish Government's wasteful spending and failure to plan ahead have led to significant pressures on the Scottish Budget, including £5 billion lost to waste; notes that the Scottish Fiscal Commission has projected a £1.9 billion gap between spending pledges and available funding in the Budget by 2027-28, and believes that, in addition to effectively using the extensive fiscal powers available to it, the Scottish Government should prioritise fiscal competence and transparency in the management of Scotland's finances."

15:14

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): As normal, the Liberal Democrats will come forward with costed, reasonable proposals that will balance a growing economy with an interest in our constituencies and protecting the fabric of society. However, that is for another day, when the UK Government's budget comes forward and when there are further proposals from elsewhere.

Today, I want to acknowledge the Greens' influence. There is no doubt that the party has made an impact on the economic performance of the country and the Government. There is no doubt that they have made an impact on housing, the climate and tax. My concern is about what that

impact is, and about the Greens' lack of concern about the consequences of their policies.

For example, there have been reports of behavioural change, with people choosing to work elsewhere because of the ever-rising taxes in this country—yet there is not a peep, a word or a concern from the party about that. The party has ignored housebuilders telling us that they are investing in England, rather than Scotland. It dismissed those concerns with, "What do these people know? Do they know what they are talking about?", as if it is not a concern for the Government.

Shona Robison: Will the member take an intervention?

Willie Rennie: Not just now.

When there is evidence that the majority of what is raised through a tax rise will be lost to behavioural change, there is no concern. No questions are raised—there is no concern at all. Where is the commentary about the £624 million economic tax gap resulting from the sluggish economy? There is not a peep, a word or a concern. It is as if those things are nothing to do with the Greens.

Ross Greer: Will the member take an intervention?

Willie Rennie: Not just now.

It is important that we understand the consequences of the SNP Government's decisions, including the hundreds of millions of pounds of ScotWind money that is being used to plug the hole in the country's finances. Those problems were partly created by the Greens' economic policies. The trouble is that the Greens claim to be progressive. They tell us that they care more than everyone else, and that it is the progressiveness of the party that brings more care to the country. However, it is not progressive to lose hundreds of millions of pounds in a tax gap. It is not progressive to lose good people who choose to work elsewhere. It is not progressive to fail to build the houses that we are desperate to build in this country. That is not progressive politics—it is cavalier politics, which we should dismiss.

Ross Greer: Will Mr Rennie take an intervention?

Willie Rennie: I have only four minutes, and there is a lot to criticise with the Greens.

The Greens feel cheated, and I feel sorry for them, because they were thrown out of the Government when their allies had so willingly agreed to apply their policies in government. They feel cheated and hurt because of that. In those circumstances, I, too, would probably feel hurt. However, the Greens have now come forward with

a whole suite of popular policies for the Parliament to embrace, including suggestions for the exploration of further fiscal avenues, lots of new taxes and a rise in income tax, which is how I interpret an aspect of the Greens' motion. It does that without any acknowledgement of all the concerns that I raised—

Ross Greer: I am trying to acknowledge them, but Willie Rennie will not take my intervention.

Willie Rennie: If he wants, Mr Greer can include that when summing up.

It is important that we understand the consequences of the Greens' policies of ramping up taxes and the impact on behavioural change; of the loss of income as a result of putting up those taxes; of the £624 million tax gap; and of the loss of the ScotWind funds. None of that was in Ross Greer's speech—not one element. That is why we should forever reject the policies of the Green Party.

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

15:19

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): As we have been discussing, Scotland stands at a critical crossroads. The challenges that we face—social, economic and environmental—are not abstract, but daily realities in our communities. Those communities are not just affected by the challenges; they are poised to be the vanguard of our response. Throughout the parliamentary session, I have witnessed at first hand the untapped potential in our communities to combat the climate and nature emergencies. Communities are not waiting for permission to lead; they are demanding the opportunity.

The question before us is not whether we should involve communities but how quickly we can empower their leadership. We have seen that work before. During the pandemic, we unleashed the power of local action through trust and openness. The same spirit must now be ignited as we confront climate change, biodiversity loss, housing shortages, homelessness and poverty. However, that vision demands robust and responsive local authorities that are equipped to facilitate and amplify community initiatives.

As we begin to consider next year's budget, the stakes could not be higher. If we reconvene this time next year facing the same obstacles, we will have betrayed not just our councils, which have spent decades calling for reform, but our entire democratic principle of local governance. The time for reports and rhetoric is over; the time for action is now.

The Verity house agreement fiscal framework is an important vehicle for engagement that the Scottish Government must respect. I understand the dedication that is required to forge and maintain productive partnerships, but I also know that all can be torn up on an ill-considered whim. Equally, we must not confuse process with making meaningful progress.

While we have the opportunity, let us make progress and build on the framework. There is much to do, but we must start with three critical reforms of local government funding.

We must have multiyear funding. Westminster's indicated spending review could finally break the cycle of year-to-year uncertainty. I challenge Labour colleagues to leverage their influence with the UK Government to secure that vital change. We must escape that Kafkaesque trap that stifles long-term planning.

We must introduce powers of general competence. The Greens have been working constructively with the Scottish Government on revenue-raising powers, including the cruise ship levy and the carbon emissions land tax, but we must move beyond having semantic debates on powers of general competence. The Scottish Greens advocate for councils to have broad revenue-raising powers that are subject to appropriate oversight. The City of Edinburgh Council's years-long wait to implement a visitor levy exemplifies the current system's failings.

We need comprehensive devolution of powers, not piecemeal concessions. Council tax revaluation is being discussed. Having been involved in those discussions during our time in government, we know that the path forward requires bold leadership. The Scottish Government must convene all parties to forge a consensus on that crucial reform.

Those changes are not mere administrative tweaks but are fundamental to Scotland's community empowerment and wealth-building vision. To see a truly represented Scotland, the Government must also spearhead cross-party dialogue to advance the £4.6 million uplift of councillors' pay that the Scottish Local Authorities Remuneration Committee is calling for.

It is frustrating to see Labour and Tory amendments to our motion not only remove all mention of local government finance but fail to make any proposals for how we can ensure that our councils are adequately funded to support our communities. Once again, for the unionist parties, it is a case of all roads lead to Westminster. There is no scope for empowering our communities to make their own financial decisions. Holyrood must live on the handouts from London, and local councils are even further down the pecking order.

The Scottish Greens reject that centralising agenda. Our communities are ready, but they need councils that are resourced and thriving to facilitate local leadership. The question is, are we ready to trust councils with the tools that they need?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to conclude.

Ariane Burgess: When we gather here next year, let us ensure that we can point to tangible progress not just more promises and processes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I notify members that we now have no time in hand and that speakers will need to stick to their speaking allowance.

15:23

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): The Scottish Government faces the most persistent challenges in balancing its budget since devolution, forcing it to make difficult decisions to ensure sustainable public finances. We cannot be certain about future levels of funding until the UK Labour Government announces its first budget on 30 October. Worryingly, if its first three months are anything to go by, it looks like the Chancellor of the Exchequer's solution will be more austerity, in the tradition of Gordon Brown and subsequent coalition and Tory UK Governments.

Of course, although Labour's group of supine MSPs must follow the Starmer line, the Tories have completely lost the plot and any sense of fiscal rectitude. At last week's general and First Minister's question times, all that they offered was a lazy litany of moans and uncosted funding demands. Douglas Lumsden's was about the A96, Craig Hoy's was about pubs, Brian Whittle's was about the third sector, Oliver Mundell's was about dyslexia assessments, and Pam Gosal's was about police pay. Tory demands already amount to more than £1.5 billion a year since early September, with no attempt whatsoever at costing or prioritisation. Frankly, it is embarrassing.

One hoped that their new leader would get a grip. There are no signs of that so far, although Murdo "Always the bridesmaid, never the bride" Fraser continues to valiantly tilt at that windmill.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Gibson, I warn you against nicknames in the chamber, please.

Kenneth Gibson: It seems that the Greens' approach to taxation is "How much do you earn? Hand it over." However, the Scottish Greens at least suggest ways to address the sustainability of public services. A cruise ship levy at the discretion of local authorities seems sensible and is in line with actions that have been taken in Greece and

Italy. It could benefit Inverclyde, which is subject to the harmful sulphuric oxides that are emitted by cruise liners, despite very little passenger spend being retained locally.

Taxing private jets flying from Scotland is an interesting suggestion. I, for one, was surprised that more than 12,000 such flights took off from Scotland last year. Although that is a potential source of revenue, the Government must also look at the potential impact on the people who are employed in crewing and maintaining such aircraft and the airports where the planes are hangared.

In 1999, the McIntosh report proposed to give local authorities a "power of general competence". That is a subject in the motion, and I was pleased that Ariane Burgess touched on it. I raised that specific recommendation in the chamber 25 years ago—I was very young at the time—and indicated full SNP support for it. Labour's Wendy Alexander initially backed it, but a year later changed it to a power of general initiative. That was further diluted to a "power to advance well-being", which was set out in section 20 of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003. The Society of Local Authority Lawyers and Administrators in Scotland said:

"As envisaged, the Courts have interpreted the power of wellbeing in a restrictive way. The underlying reason for this is the ... ultra vires doctrine. As long as the doctrine survives, local authorities can only do what they are specifically allowed to do."

Thus, the society concluded,

"The Power of Wellbeing contained in section 20 of the 2003 Act is effectively now dead."

Although sympathetic delivery might not be easy, a public health supplement surcharge on large retailers that sell alcohol and cigarettes is already under discussion between Scottish ministers, sector representatives and public health organisations. That proposal recognises the impact of alcohol and tobacco by directly targeting large retailers that benefit from selling such products. However, if tobacco and alcohol duties were devolved, it would better allow reinvestment in improving public health, and that should be pursued.

The most effective way to ensure sustainable funding for public services, infrastructure and anti-poverty measures is to grow Scotland's economy and widen the tax base. We must focus investment on innovation, research, digitalisation and skills; enhancing productivity; and building on our globally competitive successes in life science, photonics and quantum science, to name but three.

The phenomenally successful Data-Driven Innovation initiative secured more than £200 million of private investment—four times the target and four years ahead of schedule—with our

universities providing specialist programmes and initiatives to help 500 cutting-edge companies to raise funds to drive innovation in Scotland. That shows the way forward to a more prosperous and dynamic future.

I apologise for not taking interventions, but time was against me.

15:27

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): As has rightly been highlighted by my colleagues, Scotland is the highest-taxed part of the UK. That is largely, although not exclusively, because of Scottish Green MSPs, who backed and encouraged their nationalist SNP colleagues to hike taxes and who, as they stalked the ministerial corridors of St Andrew's house, previously thought of new ways of putting up additional burdens on and barriers to Scotland's businesses and individuals.

Of course, it is not about just taxes but about the impact of their ill-considered and poorly delivered policies, too. The botched attempt at introducing a deposit return scheme and the dismissal of the genuine concerns of the very industry that the scheme was being forced on will appear in textbooks as an example of how not to legislate. Unfortunately, the damage is done. As well as millions of pounds of taxpayers' money being lost, businesses right across Scotland, including my Highlands and Islands region, were forced to prepare for a scheme that never happened. All that time was wasted. All that money—the potential funding for future investments—was lost. There was the stress, strain and frustration of it, and all because Lorna Slater and other SNP-Green ministers just would not listen.

It has had a serious impact on a lot of those businesses, but it has also damaged their already low confidence in how the Scottish Government delivers policy. Why should they have any confidence? I recently met a group of hospitality, tourism and other local businesses in Fort William that are concerned about the implementation of the visitor levy. Because of the way that it has been drafted and introduced by the Scottish Government, as well as being forced into becoming tax collectors, businesses are now being taxed twice, with VAT being incurred on the levy cost. Businesses are being forced to pay tax on tax, which forces some of them over the VAT threshold and increases both the financial and regulatory burden for all.

As ever, it did not have to be that way. Solutions were suggested by industry, but they were ignored by the Scottish ministers. Only yesterday, in the Finance and Public Administration Committee, when I asked the Cabinet Secretary for Finance

and Local Government, Shona Robison, whether she is happy with what I hope was an unintended consequence of the legislation, I received a fairly indifferent response, and certainly not one that will give any comfort to the sector that the Scottish Government has any real interest in addressing its concerns. I suspect that tourism and hospitality businesses in my region will view the SNP's response with the understandable suspicion that that botched legislation will not be amended and nothing will change.

Of course, the sector remembers that it was the Scottish Government that took the UK Government's funding for hospitality and retail in Scotland but refused to pass it on to the very businesses that it was intended to support. It is a sector that is already reeling from, but yet to feel the full extent of, the impact of short-term lets licensing. The Scottish Conservatives have long argued that the best way to grow Scotland's economy is to support businesses, to remove barriers to doing business and to build an environment that encourages entrepreneurship. However, Scotland has experienced a nationalist Government and a nationalist coalition that have heaped extra rules, regulations and burdens on our businesses.

I have focused on tourism and hospitality, but the same is true for our fishing sector, given the threat of highly protected marine areas, for the farming sector, and for almost any sector that actually wants to grow. All that has been exacerbated by Green politicians who continue to oppose much-needed investment infrastructure in projects such as the dualling of the A9 and the A96 and other road improvements. That has been devastating for communities across the Highlands and Islands.

The Scottish Green Party's coalition with the SNP was a disaster for Scotland. We are now seeing another unofficial coalition that is built on the SNP's desperation to squeeze through its endangered budget, threatening Scotland. If that happens, it will not be Scotland's priorities that are delivered; it will be the priorities of the Scottish Greens, and we already know how damaging those have been to Scotland's economy.

15:31

Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): Mr Gibson may have been young 25 years ago, but I was, in fact, a student 17 years ago. I remember campaigning in the 2007 election, when the SNP ran on a manifesto that promised to abolish and replace the council tax. Of course, the current First Minister was part of crafting that manifesto and has been part of the SNP Governments ever since, barring one year. Yet, 17 years later, not only has the council tax not been reformed but, as

was reported yesterday, the Scottish Government's joint working group on council tax reform has not even met in the six months since John Swinney became First Minister.

In a similar vein, as we have heard from my colleague Michael Marra, just last week, the Scottish Parliament passed legislation on the Scottish aggregates tax, which will replace the UK aggregates levy. That legislation makes use of tax-raising powers that were agreed as part of the Smith commission and passed in 2016, but it has taken a full decade to pass legislation on a tax that, in many fundamental ways, is the same as the prior UK equivalent.

I reference those issues because it is important to note that the Parliament has tax-varying powers but it takes time for any changes to be developed, implemented and come to fruition. Although we will have varying levels of disagreement in the debate today—and in the debates that will follow—with the Greens and other parties on the range of suggestions that are made in the Green motion today, ultimately, none of those changes will be brought about in time for the 2025-26 budget that we are discussing.

Ross Greer: Will the member take an intervention?

Paul O'Kane: I will not, because I have a lot to get through and I am now in my second minute. I apologise to Ross Greer.

If we want to talk about priorities for the coming Scottish budget, we need to say that the real change to the budget process that we need is an end to the financial incompetence that has been the hallmark of the SNP Government. We need an end to the need for statements on emergency cuts because the SNP has failed to set an appropriate budget. Let us remember that those cuts have included £116 million from the health budget, a reduction of almost £19 million in the budget for mental health services, a £24 million cut to active and sustainable travel, and nearly £16 million in cuts to social justice funding.

Shona Robison: Will the member give way on that point?

Paul O'Kane: No. I have much more to say and I have only a short time.

We must have an end to the plugging of financial black holes that the Government created with £460 million-worth of ScotWind money. That money was supposed to be earmarked for investment in our future, but it is going to be used to repair the SNP's black hole. We need an end to the waste and lack of transparency that we have seen. Senior Scottish Government sources have admitted that there is waste and a lack of transparency, and they have said:

"We haven't looked under the bonnet properly in years."

We really need an end to the sort of governance that we have seen in the recent past. The next Scottish budget needs to demonstrate a return to competence and an intention to grow the Scottish economy. We know that, had the economy grown at the same rate as the UK economy, there could be billions of pounds more to spend.

Of course, the motion does nothing to address the fundamental problems that poor economic growth is creating in Scotland's finances. We need to ensure that growth is at the heart of what we do. That has been eloquently outlined by my colleagues, as it will be in their closing speeches as well.

There are no quick fixes for the economic mess that we face in Scotland after 17 years of an SNP Government and across the UK after 14 years of the Conservatives' mismanagement of our public finances and crashing of our UK economy. However, that is the work that the new Labour UK Government has undertaken. It will take time and focus.

I fundamentally disagree with Mr Greer's assessment—Mr Harvie said some of this in the debate yesterday as well—that there has been no change. The priority of the new UK Labour Government has been to pass changes to planning laws that will help to boost house building and infrastructure development. This week, we will see legislation for a new deal for working people—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Conclude, please.

Paul O'Kane: —to increase the wages of working people in this country and to ensure that their work is stable and that we end fire and rehire and zero-hours contracts. It is not fair to make that characterisation of this Government, which is committed to change. It is time that the Scottish Government started thinking about the same.

15:36

Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): The motion raises some important issues, but no single motion is likely to cover the full complexity of the issues involved—and neither will my short speech.

I have previously critiqued the new Labour Government for adopting the Tories' fiscal rules—but do not take it from me. An important essay on fiscal rules was published this week by the distinguished Professor Chadha, director of the National Institute of Economic and Social Research. I will quote his opening line:

"The UK's current set of fiscal rules are not fit for purpose."

He goes on to say:

“They have clearly introduced an unintended incentive ... to trade off government investment for government consumption.”

Daniel Johnson: Does Michelle Thomson at least acknowledge that the rules that the Labour Government has brought forward exclude capital investment from that borrowing and are about just current expenditure—which is different from the outgoing rules—and that there is speculation that they may change?

Michelle Thomson: [*Inaudible.*]—possibly agree to anything. As I will go on to say, it seems to be a moving feast as we speak—as he would know if he had read *The Guardian* today.

I would argue that at least three things argue against having a rigid fiscal rule and that we need appropriate flexibility and discretion in its use. First, we never have perfect information about the economy. Secondly, we do not know what future shocks await. Thirdly, we do not have perfect tools to enable us to meet targets. Perhaps it is those arguments, which I and others have been making, that prompted *The Guardian's* report today that the UK chancellor is believed to be considering using an alternative debt metric and abandoning the one that she originally intended to copy directly from the Tories.

Nevertheless, those changes will simply increase UK debt, which is currently nearing a whopping £3 trillion and close to 100 per cent of UK GDP. An additional consequence of this dithering is that it is now more expensive to borrow. Despite that, I support—if it is true—more investment, given the chronic underinvestment, particularly in capital, of the UK over decades, which has consistently lagged behind that of other large, advanced economies.

The motion calls on the Scottish Government to use

“every power at its disposal”.

That is fine, but I want to introduce a cautionary note. Existing powers here are very limited and, critically, lack the flexibility and discretion that are needed for overall management of the economy. As a consequence, the very limited powers that we have must not be burdened with the expectation that they can address all areas in need. I am concerned, for example, that tax should not be treated as some kind of easy, short-term fix at the expense of medium and long-term growth. If we want to significantly increase our tax take, the most effective way to do that is to grow the economy. That emphasis on growth is missing from the motion, with its overreliance on limited tax powers.

I will return to the insight provided by Professor Chadha. In considering the wider context of fiscal

rules, taxation, debt and policy objectives, he concluded that we need to take

“a decision about how to change the level of taxes to meet expenditures and to what extent debt should be issued to allow tax changes, which are sui generis distortionary, to be smoothed.”

He went on to say:

“The instruments ought to be used to meet the social objective but in our current framework”

—he means the current UK framework, of course—

“they have become the target themselves, and so we have conflated instrument with objective leading to fundamental failures in the regime.”

I watch with great interest to see whether the new UK Government continues those fundamental failures.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to closing speeches.

15:40

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): As ever, I seek consensus in a debate in which, although some members have been trying to find disagreement, I think that there is consensus.

First, if we are going to solve the issues around the sustainability of the Scottish budget—I think that there is consensus that there is an issue in that regard—there requires to be partnership between the UK and Scottish Governments.

I go back to the point that Ross Greer made when he intervened on Murdo Fraser, about the decisions that have been made by the UK Government on things such as social security. Colleagues on all sides of the chamber, whatever their views, have to accept, if they believe that partnership working needs to be at the heart of the solutions, that, however much they might seek to deny it, social security decisions will—it stands to reason—have had those impacts.

Likewise, Murdo Fraser was right to highlight the Barnett formula and the fact that we have 20 per cent higher spending in Scotland than exists in the rest of the UK. We, and taxpayers in Scotland, should be asking a simple question: are our public services 20 per cent better as a result? I think that, if we are being honest with ourselves, we have to say that they are not. That goal is what we must strive towards.

I also observe that, regardless of our constitutional views—there has been much talk about the unionist parties and what they may be saying—the fundamental nature of our economy is such that decisions that are made in one part of these islands will always impact the others, and

the solutions are, therefore, always going to be about Governments working together.

There is a fundamental challenge, however, in that there is a £2 billion black hole at the heart of the Scottish Government's budget. That is the point about sustainability, which, if I am to be honest, I think that the motion somewhat skirts around. It also skirts around the fundamental issue of the underperformance of the Scottish economy to the tune of £600 million, as was clearly identified in the Scottish Fiscal Commission's most recent reports.

Against that backdrop, there is at best a time lag—as my colleagues Michael Marra and Paul O'Kane correctly pointed out—between coming up with some of the ideas that the Greens have set out in their motion and the implementation of those ideas and seeing them bear fruit.

I would actually go a little further—

Ross Greer: Will the member take an intervention?

Daniel Johnson: Very briefly.

Ross Greer: I very much agree with Mr Johnson's point about the relative underperformance of the economy. If we had included every point in our motion, however, it would have been an essay.

Does Mr Johnson accept the Greens' position that one of the challenges for the Scottish economy is a lack of strategic direction? We cannot be the best, and a world leader, in everything—we need to decide which sectors are the priorities for public support.

Daniel Johnson: I completely agree with that point, which is well made.

Kenneth Gibson made an important point about general competence. We need to look at the role of both local and regional government, because that is where the building blocks of the economy lie. When we talk about implementation in respect of skills, infrastructure and housing, that is at the heart of where we see growth, and ultimately the issue is growth.

As I close, I will highlight Willie Rennie's contribution, because I think that it goes to the heart of the debate. If we are going to address the £600 million gap, we cannot simply ignore the behavioural effects and the waste. Willie Rennie hit on something really important: it is not progressive to ignore those things.

I tell members what is progressive: growing above-median-wage jobs. If we do that, it is better not only for the people who are in such employment, but for the economy and the public finances. If we grow our economy by just 0.1 per cent more than the growth in wages in the UK, we

get £25 million. Let us deliver those better jobs, using the levers that we have around skills, infrastructure and planning, and let us drive up the public finances and drive up wages for ordinary working people. That is how we will fix the fiscal sustainability problem.

15:44

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife)

(Con): I am pleased to close the debate on behalf of the Conservatives—my first in my new role as the shadow minister for local government and public finance. I will support the amendment in the name of Murdo Fraser at decision time.

It is clear that the Scottish public are not receiving the standard of public service that they expect, and it is also clear that the Scottish economy has not performed as well as it could have done over recent decades. However, it would be flattering the Scottish Government to say that that can be blamed on a lack of powers. As my colleague Murdo Fraser has highlighted, Scotland's is among the most powerful devolved Governments in any part of the world, and any supposed failure of devolution is not due to the lack of fiscal levers—they exist—but down to successive choices that devolved Governments have made.

Instead of using its devolved tax powers to make Scotland a more attractive place in which to live and work, the SNP Government has done the opposite. It has imposed more than £1 billion-worth of additional taxes. In recent years, it has been aided and abetted in that by the Scottish Greens.

Shona Robison: Will the member give way on that point?

Alexander Stewart: I would like to make some more progress. I have only four minutes.

The truth is that the current Scottish Government has failed to make effective use of the levers that it already controls. When the Labour UK Government decided to cut pensioners' winter fuel payments, the Scottish Government could have recognised the importance of those payments to Scottish pensioners, who face lower temperatures in this part of the United Kingdom. Devolution could have shown the way forward in dealing with that. Instead, the SNP Government simply chose to pass the cuts on to Scottish pensioners. Even when it was presented with the opportunity to use devolution for the better, the Scottish Government chose, in effect, to bypass devolution in its entirety.

Ross Greer: Given Alexander Stewart's complaints about the £1 billion—it is actually £1.5 billion—of additional taxes and about the

Government not spending £160 million on winter fuel payments, can he tell us what the Scottish Conservatives would cut to compensate for those tax cuts and for appropriate spending on the winter fuel payment that they have just proposed?

Alexander Stewart: We could start with some of the waste, and we would certainly not spend billions of pounds on the national care service.

With regard to some of the speeches that we have heard, Murdo Fraser talked about the Green Party being hostile to economic growth and the Scottish Government not using the powers that it has. We heard that the block grant has continually grown, that it is now 20 per cent higher and that the new taxes that the Government has introduced have ensured that Scotland is the highest-taxed part of the United Kingdom. The Scottish Government has made wrong choices; indeed, the Scottish Fiscal Commission has also highlighted the Government's errors.

Willie Rennie talked about behavioural changes and individuals and organisations moving out of Scotland, and he also mentioned policies such as the £624 million economic tax grab and higher taxes. My colleague Jimmy Halcro Johnston talked about Scotland being the highest-taxed part of the United Kingdom, visitor levies and the failed deposit return scheme.

All of those policies matter and have a massive impact. Any debate about the Scottish budget priorities is an opportunity for a constructive discussion on how Scotland's powers can be used effectively, but the solutions that are proposed in the Green motion do nothing to address that. Our amendment calls on the Scottish Government to recognise that its higher tax and anti-growth strategies do not work. Instead, the Government should do all that it can to ensure that we make Scotland the best place in which to live, work and invest.

I support the amendment in the name of Murdo Fraser.

15:48

The Minister for Public Finance (Ivan McKee): I thank Ross Greer and the Scottish Greens for bringing this subject to the chamber for debate. It gives us an early opportunity to explore some of the options that might get discussed further as we move closer to the budget debates later this year and into next year. I thank members for their varying contributions and will talk about some of them shortly.

First, it is important to recognise the centrality to the process of the UK Government's announcement on 30 October. It will be crucial in determining the funding that we have in Scotland

and how far we can deliver on the ambitions of the Scottish Government and other parties across the chamber. As long as our funding is tied to decisions taken at Westminster, that will be the case.

The motion makes it clear that the fiscal levers that we have are inadequate in delivering the change that we want in Scotland. We agree absolutely, but we are determined to work with the UK Government to improve the situation.

An early indication will be whether the UK Government changes its fiscal rules, as we propose in our amendment. I understand that the Chancellor of the Exchequer will be communicating with the Office for Budget Responsibility today on how she wants to move forward with the fiscal rules. We want them to focus on public sector net worth, which will mean that our public assets will be properly valued, while retaining a prudent approach that allows the investment that we need to build a future for our economy. One thing is sure: if the chancellor continues with the low-investment and low-growth approach of her predecessors, Scotland will be held back.

Daniel Johnson: On the fundamental dilemma whether we should try to fix fiscal sustainability through additional levies or through economic growth, what side of the debate does the minister come down on?

Ivan McKee: The Government is unashamedly pro-growth. We work to increase fiscal sustainability by increasing revenues through economic growth, as the member well knows.

It was good to hear some constructive suggestions from Opposition parties about what they would like to be included in the budget, but, frankly, we did not hear such suggestions from all parties, which was a bit of a shame and a missed opportunity.

Turning to some of the contributions, I think that Murdo Fraser's contribution and the other Conservative contributions deserve a special mention. The Conservative amendment mentions "financial illiteracy". That comes from a party that is, on the one hand, asking for £1.5 billion of additional funding—I think that even more money was being added to the list during the contributions from Conservative members—while, on the other, asking for £1.5 billion of tax cuts from the Scottish Government. That would amount to a £3 billion black hole. That is financial illiteracy on stilts, but it is to be expected from the party of Liz Truss.

The fact is that, according to the latest statistics, the Scottish economy is growing at the same rate as the UK economy. In fact, if we look back over the longer term, we see that, since 2007, the

Scottish economy has per capita grown at twice the rate of the UK economy, and productivity in Scotland has grown at twice the rate of productivity in the UK.

Daniel Johnson: Will the minister take an intervention on that point?

Ivan McKee: The latest figures also show that there has been higher earnings growth in Scotland and that, outside of London, Scotland is the best-performing part of the UK in relation to inward investment. There has been positive migration from the rest of the UK into Scotland—despite our higher taxes, as we ask those who can afford to pay more to do so—because people see other benefits of coming to live and work in Scotland.

To answer Daniel Johnson's point, I note that we do not spend 20 per cent more on public services in Scotland. In fact, we spend 30 per cent more per head of population than the rest of the UK, and we pay our key public sector workers—teachers, doctors and nurses—more, too.

Daniel Johnson wanted to make a brief intervention.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): I think that the minister should move on and conclude.

Ivan McKee: Okay. He is too late, so I will move on.

Turning to Labour, I note that there was much talk about council tax, but it provided no plans for what it would put in its place. It is interesting to see the party's direction of travel on that issue, given that it looked at the black hole and, despite being aware of what was coming down the track, decided to make the poorest pay by cutting the winter fuel payment.

We are using the powers that we have to maximum effect. Our decisions on income tax since devolution have meant that we have had an additional £1.5 billion to spend on the things that matter to the people of Scotland. Our action to address child poverty is making a difference—100,000 children will be kept out of poverty this year as a result of the Scottish Government's policies. We are leading the rest of the UK in renewable energy production, and our target to reach net zero by 2045 is more ambitious. However, we need to go further, so I want the Scottish Parliament to have the full range of fiscal powers that we need to meet the challenges that we face and to seize the opportunities of the future.

15:54

Lorna Slater (Lothian) (Green): The overwhelming narrative in today's debate has

been one of scarcity. There appears to be a collective belief that, despite having had more than 150 years of an industrial market-based growth economy, we find ourselves out of money. That is obvious codswallop. Plenty of money and wealth have been generated. The question is: where has that gone? Given that, from my quick googling, I found that the chief executive officer of BP has an annual compensation package of £8 million and that BP made a profit of \$66 billion last year, it is clear that we do not live in an economy that is short of money.

We do not live in a time of financial scarcity. In fact, we live in a time of financial abundance. Massive multinational corporations are allowed to make eye-watering profits while generating carbon emissions, pollution and environmental damage, and expecting other people—usually the public purse—to pay to clean it up or to pay for the consequences. The oil, gas and aviation industries create climate change, but the Government has to repair broken bridges, roads and homes when there is a catastrophic flood.

I ask all members of Parliament for some honesty in finance. We cannot demand billions more in spending without increasing taxes or cutting spending elsewhere. I know that everyone likes to wave the magic growth wand as if that will solve all our problems.

Daniel Johnson: On that point, does Lorna Slater acknowledge that the Green Party's motion does not set out a range of measures to fix the financial hole that she is alluding to. Will she reflect on that point?

Lorna Slater: I aim to set out some more measures that we think can be used to raise revenue in Scotland. Of course, Scotland's revenue-raising powers are quite limited and that goes nicely into my next point, which is that I have some sympathy with calls not to tax workers more. Income tax is not my favourite tax—it is a tax on people's work. Rents, inheritances and capital gains are all forms of income, but they are all taxed less heavily than people's work.

Because of the limited powers of devolution, income tax—as I said, it is not my favourite tax—is one of the few powers that the Scottish Government has to use, and it is right to use it to generate funding for our public services. Our baby boxes, free public transport for large numbers of people, free eye tests, the Scottish child payment, free prescriptions, free university tuition and better pay for nurses are all things that make Scotland a better place to live, and, in my view, they give good value for money.

However, limited powers on taxation does not mean no powers, and the Scottish Government should be aligning every policy and all its spending

decisions behind its stated goals of tackling the climate and nature emergencies and tackling child poverty. However, we are not seeing that. What we see from the Scottish Government is policy incoherence. For example, there is massive spending on expanding road capacity during a climate crisis, when the Government has the stated goal of reducing car kilometres by 20 per cent. That is seriously counterproductive.

The Scottish Fiscal Commission has calculated that at least £1.1 billion per year more is needed to account for net zero spending. Let us not make that amount bigger or worse by spending what money we do have on projects that increase emissions. Failing to reduce emissions now—or, worse, increasing them—will store up more costs for decarbonisation in the future, as well as increasing the risk of incurring future costs to deal with the effects of flooding, wildfires and other manifestations of the climate crisis.

I have some suggestions for how we can increase revenues in Scotland to support the delivery of local services while, at the same time, incentivising emissions reductions and moving towards net zero. With the limited powers that we have in Scotland, one of the things that we can do in this space is implement a private jet tax. The intention to allow Scotland to have an airport departure tax has been in place for a decade, but without the key exceptions for islands in order to make the policy at all workable. I urge the Scottish Government to approach the UK Government urgently to resolve that issue.

Very wealthy people who own large landholdings in Scotland are managing their land in such a way that it is emitting carbon. Land that should be behaving as a carbon sink is deforested or has damaged peat on it. A carbon land tax that would be collected by local authorities would not only fund their journey to net zero and local service delivery but motivate those large landowners to manage their land in the way that they must if Scotland is to reach net zero by 2045.

The Scottish Government has so many opportunities to empower local authorities to raise the money that is needed: a stadium levy to ensure that communities benefit when they host large events; a cruise ship levy to ensure that communities benefit when they host cruise ships; and all the ideas that my colleague Ross Greer presented, including making good on the promise to properly reform council tax.

In wrapping up, I ask the Scottish Government how spending can be allocated effectively if there is no clear focus. If tackling climate change and tackling child poverty are really the Government's top priorities, we need to show coherence across Government and align to deliver those things, instead of having different parts of Government

pulling in different directions, as we have when one part of Government is subsidising increases in carbon emissions while another part is funding reductions in them; one part of Government is increasing road capacity while another part is looking for policies to reduce it; and one part of Government is avoiding a public health levy while the NHS is creaking from a lack of funding.

I challenge the Scottish Government to make good on its promises and to bring its policies in line with its stated goals.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on budget priorities 2025-26. There will be a short pause before we move on to the next item of business to allow front-bench teams to change position, should they so wish.

Bus Travel (Asylum Seekers)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-14823, in the name of Maggie Chapman, on free bus travel for asylum seekers. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons.

16:01

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): Imagine a bus stop where a line of people is waiting. They are accustomed to waiting. They have all been waiting for more than a year for a decision on their asylum claims and their status as the refugees they know themselves to be. Some will wait for two years and some will wait for three, while some might wait for much longer.

Each of them has somewhere important to go. Ana is going to see her general practitioner about a lump that she has noticed, which she has been trying not to think about through the long sleepless nights. She has not seen the doctor before, and she hopes that she can communicate what she needs to say.

Ben is going to his English language classes. He hopes to resume his professional career when his claim is finally decided. In the meantime, he is volunteering for a local charity.

Carlos is going to see his solicitor about a worrying letter that he has received. He will have to get a bus again for his next Home Office appointment.

David is going to meet some distant relatives of his wife on the other side of the city. He is wondering whether there will be a discount supermarket on the way, where he can buy essentials at less than the exorbitant prices that are charged at the nearest shops.

Elias and Elisha are both going to pray, at different places of worship. Having been forced from their homes and families, moved between unsuitable forms of accommodation without notice or explanation and barred from working, they sometimes feel that the choice to practise their faith is the only form of agency that they have left.

Fred, who is afraid to use his birth name, does not know where he is going but hopes to find somewhere green and quiet where he can sit in peace for a while, and maybe even sleep. He was tortured in his old country, and now, when he is sharing a small room with a stranger who shouts in his dreams, the memories keep flashing back. If he cannot escape them, he is afraid that he will not be able to carry on.

They might not say so, but they are all exercising their human rights—their rights to healthcare, to education, to a fair hearing and to religious expression and association. They are exercising their right to life itself.

The bus stop that I have described is imaginary. In reality, most of the people who are waiting cannot afford to take the bus. Maybe they will miss their appointments, with all the consequences that will follow. Maybe they will manage to walk there. Maybe someone will help them. We do not really know. We are not really watching.

Why are we talking about human rights anyway? This is the beginning of a transport debate. Human rights, equalities and all that stuff come at the end, do they not? We devise the policy, draft the legislation and then, when we already know what we are going to do, we add an equalities assessment at the end. That is the right way round, is it not?

Seventy-five years ago, the world was wounded and traumatised by war, devastation and the horrors of fascism. Rebuilding was critical and urgent, but the priorities were not just physical and economic; the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and, three years later, the refugee convention were the moral bedrock on which a better world was to be built.

Human rights are not an epilogue, an afterthought or a niche interest that the right committee and the right third sector organisation will deal with; they are the responsibility of all of us, and we must begin by recognising them and the ways in which they are far from being fulfilled.

The United Kingdom's immigration system is a disgrace—that is a polite word for it. It represents a systematic denial of the most basic rights: respect and dignity. The huge backlog of unmade decisions—the condemnation of vulnerable people to existential limbo—is one of its worst aspects. We in the chamber can do little, as things stand, to change that system, although we can take every opportunity that we have to try. We can dismantle some of the obstacles that stand between people seeking asylum and their fundamental human rights, one of which is a lack of—literally—affordable transport.

As deputy convener of the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee, I have had the privilege of hearing at first hand about those obstacles and of contributing to the committee's report last year, which strongly recommended extending free bus travel to those seeking asylum. As Kaukab Stewart, who was then our convener, said in Paul Sweeney's welcome members' business debate on the issue a year ago, in October 2023, that is

“something that would make a huge difference to their lives.”—[*Official Report*, 26 October 2023; c 31.]

The situation is now even more desperate than it was then, when we held out greater hope that things would be different under a Labour Government in Westminster. Sadly, although the very worst and most egregious horrors of the Rwanda scheme have been abandoned, we are hearing rhetoric that is depressingly similar to that of the new Government's predecessor. Meanwhile, third sector finances are under unprecedented pressure, inflation continues and the flames of violent xenophobia lick at our very doorways.

Now, if ever, is the time for Scotland's rhetoric to become reality and for warm words of welcome to initiate acts of justice. It is not at times of plenty that our promises are tested, but in days such as these, when the temptation to abandon them is strongest.

I am so very grateful to all who have stood in solidarity on the issue with people seeking asylum, including those who have written to the cabinet secretary and the minister involved and who have used their voices in faith communities, as third sector experts, human rights activists and human beings. I thank members from across the chamber who will support the motion not just because they must but because it is a matter of basic rights and justice.

I ask the cabinet secretary to provide clarity on detail and a timescale for how, through working together across the chamber and with others, we can make that renewed promise a reality, both urgently and comprehensively, because some of the most vulnerable people in the world are relying on us to do so in order to exercise their rights as human beings.

I move,

That the Parliament believes that the Scottish Government should extend free bus travel to people seeking asylum as soon as possible and at least before the end of the current parliamentary session.

16:08

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport (Fiona Hyslop): I take the opportunity to welcome Sue Webber and Claire Baker to their new positions.

I hope that everyone in the chamber would support the idea that people seeking asylum in our country should be able to access adequate financial support, including free bus travel. Those people are fleeing danger and seeking a better life for themselves and their families; they often leave everything behind to start again with very little. Of course, we should do what we can to help them to do so. Surely no one can take issue with the aim

of the motion, but the issue is more about how best to do it.

Many of the services that support people seeking asylum are devolved, yet asylum policy remains reserved. Under present UK Government policy, the vast majority of people seeking asylum are restricted from working while they await a decision, and the financial support that they receive does not reflect the real costs of daily life. While that remains the case, access to free bus travel has the potential to be transformative for people seeking asylum in Scotland in supporting them to access essential services and integrate into the communities that they live in. Such free travel for asylum seekers does not yet exist.

Many people and organisations contributed their time and effort to developing the pilot proposal and were frustrated, disappointed and, in some cases, angry that the funding was not available this year to take it forward. However, we remain committed to trying to find a way through the budget processes that are left in this parliamentary session to fund that support.

Maggie Chapman: I am sure that the cabinet secretary will be aware that, last year, prior to the agreed money, a pilot in Glasgow and work in Aberdeen had been delivering free bus travel for asylum seekers. What role did those experiences over the previous 10 months take in shaping the cabinet secretary's decision in August?

Fiona Hyslop: The experiences helped with my decision and position when I set out the Government's position a year ago in the debate to which Maggie Chapman referred. I have talked to the people who provided the pilots, but what we are talking about here is free travel for all asylum seekers, as opposed to a pilot. It is clear that that initial work has informed what can be done in terms of the process.

I hope that members in the chamber who are sympathetic to or support the proposal also support the need to find a way forward through the budget processes in the Parliament. If members refuse to vote for the Scottish budget, this and other commitments will not get funded.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Fiona Hyslop: I need to move on, please.

Meanwhile, the Scottish Government remains firmly committed to supporting people seeking asylum, refugees and communities through the new Scots refugee integration strategy. We are working closely with partners across Scotland to deliver the remaining actions in that ambitious plan. That includes investment in this financial year of £3.8 million of grant funding towards the delivery of the new Scots refugee integration

strategy in 2024-25. We are also funding third sector organisations to support refugee integration, with a total of £488,000 of grant funding this financial year.

As is set out in the delivery plan, we remain fully committed to ensuring that as many of the estimated one in three people seeking asylum who are already eligible for free bus travel via our existing national concessionary travel scheme are able to access that. People seeking asylum in Scotland who are under 22, are 60 or over or have an eligible disability are already entitled to concessionary travel. I strongly urge everyone who might be eligible to apply, and I have tasked officials to work with local authorities and third sector organisations to support people to overcome any barriers that they face in securing their entitlement.

However, without all the powers and resources of a normal independent country, and while immigration and asylum remain reserved, we will be limited in what we can do to support people here, and without more and better funding and commitment from the UK Government, our local authorities are in the same position. That is why we have repeatedly called for the UK Government to provide adequate financial support for people seeking asylum to better reflect daily living, including digital access and travel costs. The Home Office is reviewing asylum support, and I hope that we can unite in the chamber today to encourage the new Labour UK Government to change from the approach of its predecessor.

I move amendment S6M-14823.3, to insert at end:

“, and urges the UK Government to provide adequate financial support to local authorities and asylum seekers to ensure that they are not pushed further into hardship.”

16:13

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): Last November, the then First Minister, Humza Yousaf, confirmed the free bus travel for asylum seekers scheme and said that £2 million had been set aside to pay for it. However, during the summer, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government, Shona Robison, said that spending cuts were unavoidable, and the Scottish National Party scrapped plans for the scheme.

We all want to do right by asylum seekers and help people in need, but it is on every politician in this building to spend public money on the biggest challenges our country faces. Everything we do in Parliament is built on taxpayers' money. That money must be spent on the most pressing concerns of the people in this country. As commendable as it may be to many, the proposal to spend millions of pounds on giving asylum

seekers free travel comes at the same time that the SNP and Labour are taking away winter fuel payments from our pensioners. People who have worked hard all their days are getting their winter fuel payment cut. They will be forced to make tough calls this winter. Some will choose between heating and eating. It is not right—it is, in fact, downright scandalous—to take money from pensioners in favour of this proposal. To people across Scotland, it looks like the Scottish Parliament has lost the plot.

Maggie Chapman: Does the member agree that we should be funding winter fuel payments and free bus travel for asylum seekers? She was in the chamber for the previous debate, and knows that there is plenty of money around—it is about how it is distributed. At the moment, the money is being hoarded in the hands of a few rather than distributed to the hands of many.

Sue Webber: I do not recognise the description that it is being hoarded by a few. The only tax that the Green Party seems to like is tax that other people are paying. There is no clearer evidence than this that the Scottish Parliament has lost the plot. Parliament is detached from the everyday lives of people across Scotland. No wonder so many people feel that it does not stand up for them or represent their interests. Taking money from pensioners so that asylum seekers can have free travel shows the disconnect between the Parliament and the people of Scotland.

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): Does Sue Webber recognise that it is extremely dangerous to pit vulnerable groups against each other and that there is no suggestion that money should be taken from those who have had their winter fuel payment cut to give to asylum seekers? We should be doing both. Pitting those communities against each other is extremely disingenuous.

Sue Webber: I remind Ms Mackay that our pensioners are some of the most vulnerable people in Scotland. I am standing up for them. This plan shows what is wrong with Scottish politics and what needs to change. My party will oppose plans to give free travel to asylum seekers while taking money away from pensioners, but I am grateful that the cabinet secretary outlined that some asylum seekers are already eligible for free bus travel.

We believe that every penny of taxpayers' money must be spent carefully to address the concerns and needs of people up and down Scotland. We believe that Scotland's Parliament should be more focused on what matters to Scotland's people. Under the Scottish National Party, public transport has become unreliable and far too expensive. Unless considerable action is taken, our public transport network will continue to

decline. We are calling on the Scottish Government to

“introduce a national £2 bus fare for any single ticket on a bus route, to fully support the Community Bus Fund to allow local authorities to propose bus services in their area, and to implement integrated ticketing across all public transport”

because that will impact everyone positively.

I move amendment S6M-14823.2, to leave out from “extend” to end and insert:

“ensure that there are reliable and affordable bus services in every community across Scotland; acknowledges that the Scottish Government has failed to make the ‘public transport network cleaner, smarter and more accessible than ever before’, as was the stated aim of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019, and calls on the Scottish Government to introduce a national £2 bus fare for any single ticket on a bus route, to fully support the Community Bus Fund to allow local authorities to propose bus services in their area, and to implement integrated ticketing across all public transport.”

16:18

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I am pleased to open the debate, and I look forward to working with colleagues across the chamber. I recognise the contribution of Alex Rowley, who was previously in this role as transport spokesperson, in particular for his tenacious approach to improving Scotland’s public transport in the interests of passengers and workers.

I thank the Green Party for using its time to put pressure on the Scottish Government to reverse its decision to cancel the extension of the free bus pass scheme to people seeking asylum. As the cabinet secretary recognised, that announcement was met by disappointment and, at times, anger. Insult was added to injury as the announcement to withdraw that commitment came on the same day as the “New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy Delivery Plan 2024-2026” was launched.

The promise of free bus travel for people seeking asylum was widely welcomed last November. It followed a campaign involving the Maryhill Integration Network, the VOICES Network and others, with political support and leadership from Mark Ruskell, Bob Doris and my colleague Paul Sweeney, who led a members’ business debate on the campaign in October 2023. That followed work by the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee, which recommended extending the free bus pass scheme to asylum seekers, saying that it would be “transformative”.

A budget has already been allocated for concessionary travel, and the amount that is required to extend it is not unachievable.

People who are seeking asylum are recognised as one of the most vulnerable groups in society, as Maggie Chapman described. The financial

support that they receive from the Home Office is limited, which makes it difficult for them to meet anything beyond basic needs.

The ability to access public transport would support their integration into our communities and help to prevent isolation. It would support them to attend appointments that are important to their status and to access healthcare and educational opportunities. It would allow them to build a network by making it easier for them to meet friends and family and attend community groups where the people of Scotland provide a warm welcome and opportunities.

A promise was made, but the reversal of that promise followed the Green Party’s departure from Government. It is quite a cynical move from the Government to appear to be prepared to reinstate the commitment without setting out how it will fund or implement it.

The truth is that it was not a budget cut. The £2 million fund was never there in the first place and no funding for the policy was ever allocated in any budget portfolio. The policy should be ready to introduce if the funding is reinstated.

Although the cabinet secretary talked in the previous members’ business debate about the complexity of expanding the scheme, I assumed that there was a route map to delivery. In the Scottish budget, £2 million is not insurmountable, and the benefits of the policy are clear.

From the start, the promise of free travel for asylum seekers failed to be properly funded. If the Government is committing to implementing it today, it needs to provide assurances on funding and implementation.

The Scottish Government’s amendment is an attempt to deflect responsibility from a situation of its own making. When the First Minister announced £2 million, he said that we all have a responsibility to step up to ensure that we help as best as we can, and he took clear responsibility for the delivery of a devolved area.

It is not clear to me what the Scottish Government’s amendment is calling for. The Conservatives’ amendment seeks to remove any reference to asylum seekers and does not address the substance of the debate, which leads me to wonder whether they actually support the policy of free bus passes for asylum seekers.

The UK Government has made a start to improving the situation for asylum seekers, and the Scottish Refugee Council has recognised that, although there is much to do, some positive change has already been made, such as the scrapping of the Rwanda scheme, the processing of applications for people who arrived after March

last year, and the opening of a route for Afghan family reunion.

There are steps that we can take in Scotland. Providing the funds to deliver a free bus scheme would be a clear indication of how we value some of the most vulnerable people who come here and of how we want to help them to integrate into Scotland.

I move amendment S6M-14823.1, to insert at end:

“, and further believes that public transport should be affordable, accessible and reliable for everyone.”

16:22

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): Unlike Sue Webber, I think that this is a very apposite motion to bring to Parliament, and I congratulate the Greens and Maggie Chapman for so doing.

First and foremost, the motion speaks to our values as a nation. It does not talk about a huge amount of money. I have long called for the extension of free bus travel to asylum seekers and to anyone who is on a refugee resettlement scheme. Why? Because mobility is intrinsic to integration.

The cost of extending the availability of such a scheme would be minutely low in the context of our budget, but the scheme would provide a tangible benefit to those who have arrived here in search of a new life.

In 2022, the then SNP-Green Government promised to work with third sector partners and local authorities to consider how best to provide free bus travel for refugees, because it recognised the imperative of doing so.

Despite the policy's inclusion in the programme for government, we are still without it, and its delivery has been rolled back. I hope that, after today, the Government will rededicate itself to what it promised.

Dina Nayeri, who was just a child when she was forced to flee from Iran, summed up the imperative that falls to each of us, as decision makers, when she said:

“It is the obligation of every person born in a safer room to open the door when someone in danger knocks.”

I feel that sense of obligation acutely, and all the more so because of the dangerous and divisive rhetoric that refugees and asylum seekers have had to endure in recent times. This country has a proud heritage of offering safe harbour and a warm welcome to anyone who flees to our shores.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Would Mr Cole-Hamilton like to reflect on

Sue Webber's comments, which were inherently divisive and pitted the needs of pensioners in this country against people who are fleeing persecution and war? Is he prepared to condemn those comments, as most of us in the chamber do?

Alex Cole-Hamilton: Of course I am willing to condemn those comments. It is wholly wrong to pit one vulnerable group against another, because they are not mutually exclusive, and to do so betrays the values of this nation. Some of our proudest moments have been when we offered shelter to those in need, whether through the Kindertransport, or to people from Biafra and, more recently, Ukraine. That proud tradition jars with the hostile environment policy and rhetoric of Sue Webber's party.

When Robert Jenrick, one of the two remaining front-runners for the Tory leadership, was a Home Office minister, he asked for murals of Mickey Mouse to be painted over because the environment in places in which asylum-seeking children were housed was just not hostile enough. Shame on the Tories.

Asylum seekers have lived on barges that resemble floating prisons in conditions that foster feelings of hopelessness and, sometimes, suicide. Refugees and asylum seekers have been used as a political football. We saw the vitriol and fake news that sparked hate-filled riots this summer. We all have a duty to speak up in defence of those who come here. We should be welcoming them with open arms, not shaming them.

In June, 85,000 asylum applications were awaiting an initial decision in the UK. As things stand, during that process, asylum seekers are entitled to a roof over their heads, and very little more. They are not allowed to work and they have no recourse to public funds in the form of benefits and social security. Those rights are granted only if those people are recognised as refugees, and that process is also subject to horrendous backlogs. I am heartily glad that, in seeing the back of the Conservative Government, we also saw the back of the shameful Rwanda plan. I am pleased that the new Government seems to be striking a more compassionate humanitarian tone. I am also glad that the new Government has adopted the Liberal Democrats' proposals for more dedicated caseworkers to process asylum claims faster and clear the significant backlog.

My party wants to go further. We believe that asylum seekers should be allowed every opportunity to integrate and belong here. That starts with granting them the right to work. If we give them that right while they are waiting for their applications to be processed, they will repay that compassion and generosity tenfold. That would save the taxpayer tens of millions and it would

allow those people to generate wealth, income and taxes. They are hungry to contribute and to give back to the society that is offering them home and sanctuary. We should allow them to do so. It is my belief that everyone, no matter who they are or where they come from—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Cole-Hamilton, you are over your time. You need to conclude, please.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I will draw my speech to a conclusion. I absolutely support the Greens' motion and thank the party for securing it for debate.

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

16:27

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): It is a pleasure to follow that speech and I congratulate Alex Cole-Hamilton for many of the points that he made.

I begin by putting on record my thanks to many of the organisations that are working to support refugees and asylum seekers in our communities and, frankly, the awe in which I hold them. They include organisations in Glasgow, where a great many refugees and asylum seekers have been located over the years. I acknowledge Refuwegee—I invited Selina Hales as my local hero to the Parliament's recent 25th anniversary celebrations—the Scottish Refugee Council, and Bikes for Refugees (Scotland). Using bikes is another way of enabling refugees to be able to access all parts of our community safely, healthily and cheaply.

I acknowledge that across most, although not all, political parties, there are a great many individuals, as well as local colleagues—not just members of the Parliament—such as councillors, who have worked hard to try to ensure that refugees and asylum seekers are welcome and are made to feel welcome in our society.

For most, although clearly not all, people, empathy and compassion are part of our human nature: they are hard wired in us. Maggie Chapman was right that we should not be reliant on the work of voluntary organisations and of individuals who choose to try to make a difference to support others. We should value that volunteerism highly, but if compassion and empathy are parts of what we want in our response to the needs of asylum seekers, then it is for all of us, including the state, to offer them.

The UK's current brutality against asylum seekers did not begin with the Tory Government in 2010; the previous Labour Government also dehumanised asylum seekers. I have to admit that

I struggle to have high hopes for a fundamentally new direction, given some of the rhetoric that we heard from Labour politicians during the election campaign. In response to Claire Baker's comments, I say that I want to be able to hope for a genuine and profound change of direction in the way that the UK Government treats asylum seekers.

In the meantime, irrespective of whether that change at UK level happens, my constituents need help. The policy would cost only a small amount of money but would have a profound impact on the lives and wellbeing of those people, many of whom are the most marginalised, the most vulnerable and the most desperate of our constituents.

I ask members—as, I think, Maggie Chapman's speech did—to consider the real-life impact of what access to a GP appointment or a hospital appointment means; of what access to volunteering means for human contact and keeping a person's motivation and skills fresh and alive; of what access to English classes or other education means; and of what access to each other and to community means. Those are fundamental to our ability to have a decent life and to feel part of a community. That goes for all of us, and it absolutely goes for asylum seekers, as well.

Asylum seekers in uncatered accommodation are provided with about £7 a day to live on. One return trip on Glasgow's buses would take up almost all of that. Those who are in hotel accommodation are expected to live on just £1.36 a day. That is less than half the price of a single bus ticket. The idea that we say no to that basic provision—that simple and compassionate move—should appal any of us.

On the SNP amendment, there is nothing in it that I disagree with. In its own right, I support it, but we need to be clear that, if we are agreeing to the motion, we are agreeing to the commitment, and that is not contingent on UK change. If we pass the motion tonight, as I hope we will, the Scottish Government needs to fund it.

16:31

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): When the topic was debated in the Scottish Parliament last October, I said that we must find a way to deliver free bus travel to all asylum seekers. I also said that I had been pleased to work in partnership with colleagues, particularly Paul Sweeney and Mark Ruskell, on a cross-party basis. I know that many others are involved. I put on record that there were also sympathetic voices, at that stage, from the Conservative Party. Members should reflect on Jackson Carlaw's comments during the debate at

that time. That partnership work has been a key strength of the campaign for free bus travel, and that remains the case.

During that debate, I also paid tribute to the voices network, and Maryhill Integration Network, which is based in my constituency, for their dedication and tenacity in leading the campaign, and I do so again this afternoon.

That begs the question: what has changed since that debate? Clearly, the Scottish Government's fiscal position has been deeply undermined by the UK Government's real-terms cuts to the Scottish budget. However, I do not wish to dwell on that this afternoon, because I wish to seek and build consensus. Indeed, we must build consensus, given the lived experience of many of our asylum-seeking communities, which Maggie Chapman outlined eloquently in her opening speech.

I hope that we can agree that one of the most compelling reasons for delivering free bus travel is the incredibly low level of support that the UK Home Office makes available to asylum seekers, while simultaneously denying them the right to work.

The delivery of a free bus travel scheme almost feels like an exercise—at least in part—in mitigating another UK Government policy that is damaging to a particularly vulnerable group in society. We have already heard that asylum seekers are living on £7 a day for food, travel, clothes and other basic essentials. If board is provided, they have £8.86 a week to live on. A bus day ticket in Glasgow costs £5.60. Mr Harvie made that point, too.

The impact on asylum-seeking individuals and families is clear. What difference would free bus provision make? I have previously mentioned the success of the Refugee Survival Trust's asylum seeker free bus travel pilot, which supported asylum seekers to attend appointments related to their asylum cases and health-related appointments. It also allowed them to stay in contact with family, with friends and with support networks. It vastly improved their mental health and tackled social isolation. It was also advantageous to the Scottish and UK states, because the onward issues that would be created by not nurturing mental health and by tackling social isolation would be costs in themselves. However, it is just the right thing to do.

This afternoon, the Green's motion reasserts the clear policy commitment to deliver free bus travel for asylum seekers, and the Scottish Government amendment will ensure that we work together not only to identify how it will be funded, but to tackle the underlying issue of insufficiency of funds for asylum seekers and, frankly, our local authorities.

I very much hope that the UK Labour Government will step up and ensure that the Home Office provides adequate support in a way that the previous UK Government simply did not. That said, let us work together to secure the funding and delivery of the policy intent. I believe that the political will to do so will be there across Parliament if we work together. That is the challenge for all of us. We have to identify not just the cash, but how to deliver the policy.

In the brief time that I have left, I say that I think that the estimated cost of £2 million is an overestimation. I was looking at the funds. The cabinet secretary is shaking her head, but I will compare some statistics in relation to this. I think that £189.5 million is used for the under-22s travel scheme, to which about 752,000 youngsters have signed up, so for 5,000 asylum seekers, that figure—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: On a procedural point, Mr Doris, you will need to bring your remarks to a close, please.

Bob Doris: The point is that we come together as a Parliament, and we agree on the matter.

16:36

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I, too, welcome Sue Webber to her new role.

We have heard contrasting views in the debate today, but all of us want to see support for people locally who are struggling. In Moray, we had a hotel converted to an asylum hostel where asylum seekers were placed, and they got a lot of support from the local community. The Elgin Sports Community Trust at the Gleaner arena offered free football sessions and provided kit and football boots, and the community came together to support people as much as they could.

However, what we have heard about from members so far today are specific cases of asylum seekers struggling to get to hospital appointments or a doctor's surgery. Patrick Harvie said that that is a "real-life impact". Maggie Chapman spoke about Ana. I am also hearing about such things in Moray, not from asylum seekers but from general constituents. There are people living in rural communities in Moray who cannot get to a hospital appointment or a GP surgery because the local transport network has been downgraded because of cuts to local government funding and—centrally—bus routes have been removed. Those bus routes are crucial not just for asylum seekers but for people living throughout our communities. That is why I think that Sue Webber is right to highlight in her amendment that we can improve our local services in order to benefit everyone.

We also have to look at choices. There was concern—I would go close to saying significant concern—from Green members and SNP members who supported the interventions on the comparison that Sue Webber made between the winter fuel payment being withdrawn and free bus travel not being taken forward. People were saying that we cannot conflate the two, but here is why I believe that we can. The Government's amendment today is asking for more money from Westminster to pay for the proposal, and says that it will do it. The Government's motion yesterday was asking for more money from Westminster for the winter fuel payment, and said that the Government would then do that.

Gillian Mackay: [*Made a request to intervene.*]

Douglas Ross: The link is that the current Scottish Government would like to do all those things if it had more money from Westminster. I will give way if Gillian Mackay is trying to come in.

My question to SNP and Green members, or any member, is this: what is the current budget of the Scottish Government? How much money does the Scottish Government have to spend?

No member has tried to come in on that. It is £60 billion. That is the size of the budget that is set by the Scottish Government. It then comes down to choices. There are choices to be made by this Government about what it will spend that money on. It is a choice of the Scottish Government not to spend money on the proposal, just as it is a choice of the Scottish Government not to help pensioners this winter.

Gillian Mackay: Will Mr Ross acknowledge that the economic choices of his party are partly what has got us in the mess that we are in now?

It is also considerably disingenuous to continue that rhetoric of pitting communities against each other. Does he condemn that line from Sue Webber about pitting those communities against each other? Does he think that it is ethical to pit pensioners against refugees?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you. The intervention was a bit long.

Douglas Ross: I am sorry if Gillian Mackay did not hear me. I was actually saying the exact opposite of what she is saying.

I support what Sue Webber said, because the Government is proving that that is the case in its amendment. The Government says that it would do all those things if it had more money. It has £60 billion with which to set its budget every year and, as Bob Doris just said, what we are discussing today might be less than £2 million. The winter fuel payment is £150 million to £160 million. Those are choices for the Scottish Government, but its choices impact on our constituents and local

communities. That is why I urge members to support the amendment in Sue Webber's name.

16:41

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): I begin with the words of the great poet Tom Leonard, who wrote:

"I am a human being
and I exist

a human being
and a citizen of the world

responsible to that world
—and responsible for that world".

That is what this debate is about—not the fiscal rules or constrained budgetary circumstances. It is not about looking for someone else to blame, cabinet secretary; it is about who we are. It is about us accepting our responsibility to the world—our responsibility for that world. It is about our common humanity. That is what this debate should be about.

That means for me that the new Labour Government cannot just pick up where the old Tory Government left off in its selection of language and in its courses of action, because the facts should trouble all of us. In this country, asylum seekers are banned from working. Many of them live in Scotland's biggest city, where, over 50 years ago, the workers occupied the shipyards to fight for the right to work. It is that same city that stood in solidarity with asylum seekers as they lived in fear of a lock-change programme, of dawn raids and of forced evictions by Serco. The No Evictions network, the people, the activists and the neighbours who stood firm in Kenmure Street against immigration enforcement—that is who we should be allied to.

This is challenge poverty week, but wearing badges is not enough. Currently, asylum seekers have to prove that they are destitute. Why do we not challenge that? They are excluded from most social security benefits. The magnificent campaigning organisation Positive Action in Housing tells us that

"97% of all beneficiaries live in poverty or deprivation".

That is 97 per cent. They are expected to survive on less than £50 a week.

This Scottish National Party Government likes to label asylum seekers as "new Scots", so when I look at the Scottish Government's new Scots website, it lists the eight cities and the five international airports of Scotland, and it talks at length about travelling around Scotland by bus and by rail but, on £49.18 a week, how are asylum seekers expected to do that? It is offering them an invitation in the certain knowledge that their

circumstances prevent them from ever being able to accept it.

The Government has a new Scots integration strategy delivery plan—it was just published in July. The plan has six outcomes. It talks of forced migrants, including people seeking asylum, being able to

“access well-coordinated services”

and being able to

“pursue full and independent lives”,

and, under the heading of “Transport”, it tells us that

“both affordability and availability”

are “critical”.

What is the point of having a delivery plan if you have no intentions of delivering it?

That is why I am proud to support Labour’s amendment in the name of Claire Baker; that is why I am proud of Paul Sweeney’s leadership on this cause in Glasgow; and that is why we are speaking out in support of and will be voting for the Greens’ motion this afternoon. This is about human rights and social justice. It is a question about what kind of society we want to live in. We have the levers in this Parliament and, yes, we do have the resources, so let us use them. Let us make the right political choice. Let us be on the side of humanity.

16:44

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate. I appreciate what Maggie Chapman outlined in her opening speech and her examples of what people face, including in relation to GP or health appointments.

Scotland is pursuing its ambition to be a good global citizen by hosting vulnerable people who have fled war and persecution in adherence to the United Nations refugee convention and the European convention on human rights.

All levels of government need to work together and provide tangible improvements for refugees and people seeking asylum in the UK. The Scottish Government, unlike the UK Government, has demonstrated that. We need to build consensus. Faced with renewed austerity and brutal Westminster cuts to public services, the Scottish Government is having to make very difficult decisions to deliver a balanced and sustainable spending plan for the 2024-25 financial year.

As a result of being forced to make £500 million of direct cuts, Scottish ministers found that it would be unaffordable to progress piloting free bus travel

for asylum seekers in Scotland at this time. That doesnae mean that they do not want to do it; it is just that, at the moment, it is not possible.

The cabinet secretary mentioned that many people seeking asylum in Scotland, including those under 22 and over 60 years of age, as well as those with disabilities, are already eligible.

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

Emma Harper: I do not think that there is time; I am sorry.

People are therefore already eligible for and in receipt of free bus travel through national concessionary travel schemes. I encourage any person in Scotland who is seeking asylum to ensure that they submit their claim.

In addition, the Scottish Government is supporting people seeking asylum through the new Scots refugee integration strategy. The Scottish Government is working collaboratively with partners, including local government and the Scottish Refugee Council. The new Scots strategy delivery plan outlines specific actions that partners will take, and when they will be undertaken, with the aim of ensuring that new Scots live in safe, welcoming and inclusive communities, are able to access well-co-ordinated services, and understand their rights, responsibilities and entitlements in Scotland.

Guided by the strategy’s principles, communities across Scotland are already providing support to refugees and asylum seekers so that they can rebuild their lives and actively participate in society. That is happening well in Dumfries and Galloway, where the local authority has co-ordinated a refugee support network that comprises local people who have stepped up to offer support, clothing and help to refugees in the area.

As migration and refugee policy is reserved to Westminster, it is important to point out the Westminster Government’s failings when it comes to its legal obligations in relation to refugees. Asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants are being shamefully demonised to mask Westminster’s failings. Causing division between different vulnerable people is absolutely deplorable and should be called out. It is time for the UK Government to step up, get rid of the legacy of the Tories’ hostile environment and hostile immigration policies, and support those who will come to Scotland and contribute to our society.

One practical way that that could happen is by allowing asylum seekers to work and contribute to society, so that they have meaningful activity. The Scottish Government will always do its best with

the powers that it has, but they are simply not a substitute for independence and determining our own policy in relation to migration and asylum.

With the powers of independence, Scotland can finally deliver a fairer asylum and migration system that meets our values and needs as a progressive, forward-thinking nation. Having independent, progressive policies in this place is what we need to do for all our vulnerable people.

16:48

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): I thank the Scottish Greens for using their Opposition time to shine a spotlight on the Scottish Government's shameful decision to scrap the free bus travel for asylum seekers pilot earlier this year. I and the Labour Party will support the motion in Maggie Chapman's name.

I pay tribute to Mark Ruskell, a member for Mid Scotland and Fife, and my colleague in Glasgow, Bob Doris, the member for Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn, with whom I have worked constructively on the campaign since it launched in 2021. Mr Doris made a powerful point about the marginal increase in costs that we are talking about. The strapline of the campaign all along has been that such a small change can make a huge difference.

We know that 2.3 million Scots currently benefit from the free concessionary travel schemes in this country, and we currently have around 5,300 people seeking asylum in Scotland. The policy would equate to a 0.2 per cent increase in the number of people in Scotland benefiting from the free concessionary bus travel scheme. It is a rounding error in the Scottish Government's finances; to be frank, the notion that it is unaffordable is simply for the birds. There was simply a lack of political will, because it was seen as politically expedient to get rid of the proposed scheme. That was an unfortunate moment in the Government's budgetary process.

Fiona Hyslop: I absolutely refute what the member has said. It is clear that the issue is, and has always been, funding. I am sure that my Green colleagues would confirm that there was a question mark around the funding in relation to the original agreement. As soon as we can provide the funds and it can be agreed in our budget, I would want to pursue the policy.

Paul Sweeney: I am glad that the cabinet secretary is minded to pursue the policy, but—as we learned today—the budget was never allocated in the first place. It is simply unacceptable to lead people on like that when they are in the most vulnerable situations.

Since the campaign launched, it has garnered robust support across civil society and the third sector, and cross-party support in this place. I say to the minister that if she is seeking to generate economic growth, which should be a key objective of her portfolio, she should note that it has been independently assessed that concessionary travel schemes, for every pound that is invested in them, generate £3.79 in economic benefits. That should be factored into the calculations that are being made, bearing in mind that the increase in the number of people would be 0.2 per cent, which is a couple of high schools-worth of people added to the under-22 scheme. It is equivalent to a rounding error, or to natural churn, and it could probably be funded through the underspends in the existing programmes.

The merit of the policy is clear. In the region of Glasgow that I represent, the cost of an all-day bus ticket is more than £5. People who are seeking asylum rely on a financial allowance of just £6 a day to cover their cost of living, if they are living in flatted accommodation. For those who are provided with hotel accommodation, that allowance can be as little as £1.15 a day—that is little more than a can of Coke from a vending machine. Having to fork out £5 for bus travel to attend medical, social or essential legal appointments is, therefore, simply not an option for those people, unless they go without food or other essentials.

The concessionary bus travel scheme also allows people to integrate into their new home country, explore their new place of residence and begin to restart their lives. That is why the Scottish Government's decision to scrap the nationwide pilot is so disappointing. It would be better to be honest with campaigners, but the Government's dishonesty in this respect has been completely unforgivable. For nearly a year, the SNP was happy to lead on a working group of stakeholder organisations such as the Maryhill Integration Network and the VOICES network, knowing full well that the money was not even allocated to deliver the policy. It is some cheek for the Scottish Government to use its amendment today to try to deflect the blame on to the UK Government for its own financial incompetence and false promises, for what is such a trivial sum of money.

We agree that the people in the asylum system in Scotland are some of the most vulnerable and, as members of this Parliament, we should consider what we can do in this Parliament to help them.

This was a simple measure that would involve a relatively small increase in public expenditure, within devolved competence, to make a big difference. The way in which it was casually scrapped earlier this year was a serious concern

to us all. The media coverage concerning the delivery of the pilot, just one month before the minister announced that the scheme was to be scrapped, highlighted that the scheme was being planned and was in the works, yet it was suddenly jettisoned. That caused significant shock and anxiety. Some stakeholders were verbally told the news before the minister announced publicly, at the launch of the new Scots refugee integration strategy, that the pilot would not be going ahead—

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

Paul Sweeney: I am keen for the Government come to the table again and revisit the stupid decision that it has made, because that decision will have a massive effect on our communities. I urge the Government to do that without delay.

16:53

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I am pleased to speak in the debate. I am sad, though, that it seems to be concentrating purely on buses. That does not surprise me, however, because it was brought to the chamber by a party that is fixated on buses and which has not, to my mind, concentrated enough on trains and ferries.

Let us look at buses and what options they bring. In the Highlands, there are not that many of them, and we therefore rely on other forms of transport to get around. I have reminded members in the chamber in the past that those who want to leave Inverness to get back to Aberdeen in the evening have to leave by 9.30 pm—and goodness help them if they want to go back to Inverness, having been up in Wick for the day. They have to leave at 4 o'clock in the afternoon.

There is complete dis—I cannot think of the right word. There is complete discombobulation between buses and transport, when we should be looking at trains.

I should also say that people in the Highlands and Islands rely distinctly on ferries. We have been waiting for the Glen Sannox since 2018, and just this week we have heard that it is still not able to drop its anchor or use its engines without tripping alarms.

I want to talk about the ferries on small islands, because they are the buses that we should be talking about. That is why they must be considered when we consider this motion.

Bob Doris: I am trying to bring Mr Mountain back to the topic that is being debated, which is free bus travel for asylum seekers. He mentioned trains. Is he suggesting that we should extend the national concessionary scheme to asylum seekers on our rail network?

Edward Mountain: Interestingly, I had a conversation with a constituent on the way down to Edinburgh on Monday. She talked about wanting to be more able to travel around the Highlands. She was a Ukrainian refugee and was struggling to get around. She told me that there were no suitable buses to enable her to get around and she felt particularly isolated, which is why I am bringing up trains and why, for refugees who end up on islands, it is important that we have ferries. It is not just about buses, which is what the member is concentrating on.

I want to go back to talking about the ferries to islands. If people want to go back to Shapinsay from Kirkwall, they have to leave at 4 pm in the evening. That gives them little option to do anything else. Surely that makes people feel marginalised.

If we are concentrating on buses, we must ask how the buses will get around. It will not be on the A9, which was supposed to be dualled by 2025. There is a section of the road that we are still working on, the contract for which should have been awarded in 2021 at a certain price. It has now gone up in price and will be delayed.

It is important that we consider all the aspects of transport, not just buses. We also need to understand the cost pressures, which Sue Webber talked about. I welcome Douglas Ross's comments about how Moray is welcoming refugees, but it is not just, as he pointed out, asylum seekers who struggle to get buses.

I hope that the Cabinet Secretary for Transport can explain something that I have never been clear about. Concessionary travel on buses is funded partly by Government grant and partly by the bus operators. Who was going to fund the free travel for asylum seekers? Was it to be totally funded by the Government or would it also have been funded by the operators? Had the Government discussed that with them before it made the promise on which it then reneged?

16:57

Fiona Hyslop: I want to come back to the motion that is in front of us.

I thank most members for their contributions and the many committed individuals and third sector organisations that work tirelessly to improve the lives of people seeking asylum in Scotland. The support that they provide and the work that they do so that people who have experienced the asylum system can make their voices heard is hugely important.

Although we do all that we can, the responsibility for ensuring that people seeking asylum are provided with adequate financial

support lies firmly with the Home Office. It is hard to conceive how people manage to live on as little as £49.18 a week to cover all their food, clothing, toiletries and other needs and as little as £8.86 a week if they are in catered accommodation.

I agree with other speakers that, in that context, access to transport has the potential to provide a marked improvement to quality of life for those seeking asylum who live in Scotland. Free bus travel would enable them to access essential services such as healthcare and legal advice, and it could support them in allowing them to accompany their children to school and to take part in community activities. At this point, I put on record my thanks for the invaluable contribution of asylum seekers in Bathgate, who helped create our new community garden in Boghall in my constituency.

The report on the travel choices project makes it clear that having access to public transport supports the concept of integration from day 1 and not only enables people to do the things that they need to do but offers them opportunities to explore where they live. In the past, the vast majority of people placed in Scotland were settled in and around Glasgow and had access to a support network—including specialist and expert services, which have developed over the years—but in 2022 the Home Office introduced its full dispersal policy.

Paul Sweeney: The cabinet secretary makes an important point about how essential the third sector organisations that support people seeking asylum are to our communities, so will she take the opportunity to apologise on behalf of the Government for the haphazard way in which the policy was announced, given that it caught them completely off guard and caused their clients a lot of anxiety?

Fiona Hyslop: In my opening speech, I said that I understand how people responded to the news, and I know that the Minister for Equalities said the same when she spoke to those organisations at the time.

However, we should not underestimate the financial pressures that the Government is under. The Home Office's full dispersal policy has created an assumption that asylum accommodation can be procured in any local authority area in Scotland, which means that people seeking asylum can be placed in any local authority area, including isolated rural areas.

It is considered that the best way of implementing the policy of free bus travel for asylum seekers—and this is important in relation to the substance of the debate—would be to amend eligibility for the concessionary travel schemes. However, that would require primary legislation, and we would not be able to enact

such legislation in what remains of the current parliamentary session. In developing that option, we should learn from the development of the proposed pilot scheme, continue to have close engagement with expert third sector organisations and learn from the free bus travel pilot scheme that recently concluded in Northern Ireland if we are to deliver the best support possible with our available powers and resources.

When there is an agreed way forward in policy and practical terms, careful consideration will need to be given to the Scottish Government's devolved powers to implement the proposal. That will depend on funding being available and, as I have highlighted, on members and parties in the chamber voting in support of any future budget that contains support for the policy.

The Government remains absolutely committed to exploring how to extend free bus travel to all people seeking asylum before the end of the current parliamentary session, but we all know that, ultimately, we can do only what is possible with the limited tools and resources that are available to us. To comprehensively change how asylum seekers are treated and supported in Scotland, we need a more humane approach from the new UK Government or, best of all, we need the powers of independence in order to make our own decisions and send a clear message to people who have fled violence, war and disaster that they are safe and welcome in Scotland. The Conservatives might want to remove those people from the motion that we are debating. Let the rest of us ensure that they do not do so.

17:02

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): In closing the debate, I offer an apology to all the people in Scotland who, having fled persecution and war, are languishing in the asylum system, because the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament made a promise to them that they would receive a small but very important freedom—a free bus pass—which, in the words of Kaukab Stewart, would make a “huge difference” to their lives. That apology needs to be made.

I welcome the fact that the Scottish Government appears to be recommitting to the policy, but caveats are already starting to be introduced. The policy is apparently dependent, in part, on the budget, and the Government has said that, if we want to go down the route of a national entitlement card, there will be timescale issues. Frankly, those of us who have been working on the issue and the asylum seeker community more generally have heard those excuses over many years, and we are fed up with them.

We want to see practical progress and a timescale for implementation. We want Transport Scotland to implement the policy, not to continually workshop it, talk about it and push things out to pilot projects. A lot of work needs to be done to restore faith within the asylum seeker community in Scotland that the policy will actually be introduced.

Let us be clear: we are talking about people who are living in state-enforced destitution. As many members have pointed out, they simply cannot work—they are not allowed to work. I am thinking about the 180 people in Perthshire, in my region, who are living in hotels on £8.86 a week. That forces them to make unimaginable choices. If they wanted to get a day pass to get around Perthshire, they would have to spend half their weekly allowance on one day pass to get the bus. If they wanted to get the bus to see their friends and family or even their immigration lawyer in Glasgow, that would cost £13. They would have to spend weeks and weeks saving money just to make that essential trip. Those choices are impossible.

Patrick Harvie has already spoken about GP appointments, and I am seeing evidence of asylum seekers being unable to access out-patient appointments. These are people who have gone through mental and physical trauma. Some of these people have come from war zones. They absolutely need the medical care that they deserve. They are having to make impossible choices. Do they top up their mobile phone with extra credit or do they buy food for their kids? Can they afford to see their immigration lawyer? Those are the real-life choices that are being made.

I will turn to some of the comments that were made by Sue Webber. I am so disappointed in those comments, which I feel were frankly disgraceful and bring this chamber into disrepute. Pitching asylum seekers—

Sue Webber: Will the member take an intervention?

Mark Ruskell: No. I have heard enough, frankly.

Pitching asylum seekers against pensioners—we should always call that out in this chamber, and I call it out now. I am grateful for Alex Cole-Hamilton's very passionate speech, which underlined the values of our nation. Emma Harper made similar comments. These issues should be beyond party politics. As Richard Leonard said, we are the Scotland of Kenmure Street. Those values are embedded in this Parliament. It is beyond party politics.

Bob Doris reminded us that we have had Conservative colleagues in the past, such as Jackson Carlaw, who have taken a humanitarian

approach to the question. They left their party politics at the door. They understood this from the perspective of people in the asylum system who are desperate. I commend the work of Paul Sweeney, Bob Doris, Jackson Carlaw and many other members who have championed the needs of people in the asylum system.

Douglas Ross commented on the investment in bus services in Moray. Of course, that is important, but this debate is not about a choice. If he had cared to notice, investment in concessionary travel leads to a reimbursement rate, and many services across rural Scotland have been saved as a result of that. This debate is not about a choice or about pitching rural bus services against asylum seekers; it is about human rights.

Paul Sweeney: Mr Ruskell makes a very powerful point. Many bus companies have said that implementing the scheme would improve the viability of many routes that are currently marginal and make losses.

Mark Ruskell: Absolutely. I look at the bus services in Perthshire and I see community organisations running bus services that would welcome asylum seekers, who would help to improve their viability.

In the time that I have left, I will focus on some of the comments on the budget. The £2 million that was committed is a tiny amount of money in the context of the overall Scottish budget. As Paul Sweeney said, it is effectively a rounding error in the context of the wider budget for concessionary travel, which runs to hundreds of millions of pounds. It is 0.2 per cent of that budget.

The cabinet secretary said that we need to find a way forward in the budget process, but that does not fill me with confidence. There needs to be better financial management. Claire Baker pointed out that there has been a failure in allocating that £2 million to particular budget portfolios. That should not be the case. We have to see commitment following budget and delivery coming on the back of that.

A number of comments have been made about the amazing voluntary organisations that are supporting people who are languishing in the asylum system across Scotland. Patrick Harvie mentioned Refuweege and Bikes for Refugees. There are many informal groups of people who are supporting asylum seekers across rural and urban Scotland, but the important point was made that that help cannot be an alternative to state support. We absolutely need state support to give asylum seekers that basic right.

In the words of Maggie Chapman, we need to turn warm words of welcome into acts of justice. We need to do that. We need to commit to that

policy. People in the asylum system need free bus travel and they need it now.

Business Motion

17:09

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-14843, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme. I invite Jamie Hepburn to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 29 October 2024

2.00 pm	Time for Reflection
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Topical Questions (if selected)
<i>followed by</i>	Scottish Government Debate: Fiscal Sustainability
<i>followed by</i>	Committee Announcements
<i>followed by</i>	Business Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm	Decision Time
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business

Wednesday 30 October 2024

2.00 pm	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
2.00 pm	Portfolio Questions: Deputy First Minister Responsibilities, Economy and Gaelic; Finance and Local Government
<i>followed by</i>	Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Business
<i>followed by</i>	Business Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Approval of SSIs (if required)
5.10 pm	Decision Time
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business

Thursday 31 October 2024

11.40 am	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
11.40 am	General Questions
12.00 pm	First Minister's Questions
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business
2.30 pm	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
2.30 pm	Portfolio Questions: Net Zero and Energy, and Transport
<i>followed by</i>	Finance and Public Administration Committee Debate: Scotland's Commissioner Landscape
<i>followed by</i>	Business Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time
 Tuesday 5 November 2024

2.00 pm Time for Reflection
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Topical Questions (if selected)
followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Climate Change
 (Emissions Reduction Targets)
 (Scotland) Bill
followed by Committee Announcements
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business
followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 6 November 2024

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

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

5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Thursday 7 November 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:
 Social Justice
followed by Scottish Government Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 28 October 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.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:10

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):
 The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motions S6M-14844, on committee meeting times, and S6M-14862, on committee membership.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that, under Rule 12.3.3B of Standing Orders, the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee can meet, if necessary, at the same time as a meeting of the Parliament from 2.00 pm until the conclusion of consideration of the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 on Tuesday 29 October 2024.

That the Parliament agrees that the following changes to committee membership will apply from close of business on Thursday 10 October 2024—

Stephen Kerr be appointed to replace Meghan Gallacher as a member of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee;

Liam Kerr be appointed to replace Russell Findlay as a member of the Criminal Justice Committee;

Roz McCall be appointed to replace Tim Eagle as a member of the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee;

Jamie Halcro Johnston be appointed to replace Brian Whittle as a member of the Economy and Fair Work Committee;

Miles Briggs be appointed to replace Liam Kerr as a member of the Education, Children and Young People Committee;

Douglas Ross be appointed to replace Sue Webber as a member of the Education, Children and Young People Committee;

Tess White be appointed to replace Meghan Gallacher as a member of the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee;

Pam Gosal be appointed to replace Annie Wells as a member of the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee;

Craig Hoy be appointed to replace Jamie Halcro Johnston as a member of the Finance and Public Administration Committee;

Brian Whittle be appointed to replace Tess White as a member of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee;

Meghan Gallacher be appointed to replace Miles Briggs as a member of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee;

Alexander Stewart be appointed to replace Pam Gosal as a member of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee;

Tim Eagle be appointed to replace Rachael Hamilton as a member of the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee;

Liz Smith be appointed to replace Roz McCall as a member

of the Social Justice and Social Security Committee; and

Sue Webber be appointed to replace Oliver Mundell as a member of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

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

Decision Time

17:10

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): There are nine questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S6M-14825.3, in the name of Shona Robison, which seeks to amend motion S6M-14825, in the name of Ross Greer, on budget priorities 2025-26, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

There will be a short suspension to allow members to access the digital voting system.

17:11

Meeting suspended.

17:13

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We come to the division on amendment S6M-14825.3, in the name of Shona Robison, which seeks to amend motion S6M-14825, in the name of Ross Greer, on budget priorities 2025-26. Members should cast their votes now.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (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)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)

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

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 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)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)

Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Richard Leonard]
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD) [Proxy vote cast by Alex Cole-Hamilton]

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-14825.3, in the name of Shona Robison, is: For 65, Against 51, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Murdo Fraser is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Michael Marra will fall. The question is, that amendment S6M-14825.2, in the name of Murdo Fraser, which seeks to amend motion S6M-14825, in the name of Ross Greer, on budget priorities 2025-26, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

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)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (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)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 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)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)

Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Richard Leonard]
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD) [Proxy vote cast by Alex Cole-Hamilton]
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-14825.2, in the name of Murdo Fraser, is: For 27, Against 89, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-14825.1, in the name of Michael Marra, which seeks to amend motion S6M-14825, in the name of Ross Greer, on budget priorities 2025-26, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Richard Leonard]
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)

Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and
 Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by
 Jamie Hepburn]
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse)
 (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine)
 (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley)
 (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Abstentions

Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD) [Proxy vote cast
 by Alex Cole-Hamilton]

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-14825.1, in the name of Michael Marra, is: For 21, Against 92, Abstentions 4.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-14825, in the name of Ross Greer, on budget priorities 2025-26, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (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)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and
 Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)

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

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)

Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Richard Leonard]
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD) [Proxy vote cast by Alex Cole-Hamilton]

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-14825, in the name of Ross Greer, on budget priorities 2025-26, as amended, is: For 64, Against 52, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament notes that the fiscal levers that are currently available to the Scottish Government are inadequate to fully protect public services and communities from UK Government austerity and economic turmoil, but that the Scottish Government must use every power at its disposal to address the urgent social, economic and environmental challenges that Scotland faces; calls, therefore, on the Scottish Government to explore all avenues to fiscal sustainability, including seeking opportunities for further powers, such as those over levies and charges, to be devolved to local government for 2025-26, creating new powers, such as a cruise ship levy, exploring how a carbon emissions land tax and a power of general competence could be delivered and ensuring the most effective and progressive use of existing tax powers and tax reliefs and that spending does not undermine the core missions of tackling child poverty and the climate emergency, and calls on the UK Labour administration to scrap the fiscal rules of the former UK Conservative administration.

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that amendment S6M-14823.3, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, which seeks to amend motion S6M-14823, in the name of Maggie Chapman, on free bus travel for asylum seekers, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (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)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD) [Proxy vote cast by Alex Cole-Hamilton]
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 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)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 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)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Richard Leonard]
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Abstentions

Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-14823.3, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, is: For 68, Against 48, Abstentions 1.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-14823.2, in the name of Sue Webber, which seeks to amend motion S6M-14823, in the name of Maggie Chapman, on free bus travel for asylum seekers, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

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)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (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)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 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)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Richard Leonard]
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD) [Proxy vote cast by Alex Cole-Hamilton]
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-14823.2, in the name of Sue Webber, is: For 28, Against 88, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-14823.1, in the name of Claire Baker, which seeks to amend motion S6M-14823, in the name of Maggie Chapman, on free bus travel for asylum seekers, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (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)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 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)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)

Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Richard Leonard]
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD) [Proxy vote cast by Alex Cole-Hamilton]
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

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)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-14823.1, in the name of Claire Baker, is: For 89, Against 28, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-14823, in the name of Maggie Chapman, on free bus travel for asylum seekers, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (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)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD) [Proxy vote cast by Alex Cole-Hamilton]
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

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)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Abstentions

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Richard Leonard]
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-14823, in the name of Maggie Chapman, on free bus travel for asylum seekers, as amended, is: For 68, Against 27, Abstentions 20.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament believes that the Scottish Government should extend free bus travel to people seeking asylum as soon as possible and at least before the end of the current parliamentary session; urges the UK Government to provide adequate financial support to local authorities and asylum seekers to ensure that they are not pushed further into hardship, and further believes that

public transport should be affordable, accessible and reliable for everyone.

The Presiding Officer: I propose to ask a single question on two Parliamentary Bureau motions.

As no member has objected, the question is, that motion S6M-14844, on committee meeting times, and motion S6M-14862, on committee membership, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that, under Rule 12.3.3B of Standing Orders, the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee can meet, if necessary, at the same time as a meeting of the Parliament from 2.00 pm until the conclusion of consideration of the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 on Tuesday 29 October 2024.

That the Parliament agrees that the following changes to committee membership will apply from close of business on Thursday 10 October 2024—

Stephen Kerr be appointed to replace Meghan Gallacher as a member of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee;

Liam Kerr be appointed to replace Russell Findlay as a member of the Criminal Justice Committee;

Roz McCall be appointed to replace Tim Eagle as a member of the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee;

Jamie Halcro Johnston be appointed to replace Brian Whittle as a member of the Economy and Fair Work Committee;

Miles Briggs be appointed to replace Liam Kerr as a member of the Education, Children and Young People Committee;

Douglas Ross be appointed to replace Sue Webber as a member of the Education, Children and Young People Committee;

Tess White be appointed to replace Meghan Gallacher as a member of the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee;

Pam Gosal be appointed to replace Annie Wells as a member of the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee;

Craig Hoy be appointed to replace Jamie Halcro Johnston as a member of the Finance and Public Administration Committee;

Brian Whittle be appointed to replace Tess White as a member of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee;

Meghan Gallacher be appointed to replace Miles Briggs as a member of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee;

Alexander Stewart be appointed to replace Pam Gosal as a member of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee;

Tim Eagle be appointed to replace Rachael Hamilton as a member of the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee;

Liz Smith be appointed to replace Roz McCall as a member of the Social Justice and Social Security Committee; and

Sue Webber be appointed to replace Oliver Mundell as a member of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Brighton Bomb Blast (40th Anniversary)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-13937, in the name of Jackson Carlaw, on the 40th anniversary of the Brighton bomb blast. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises the 40-year anniversary of the bombing at the Grand Hotel, Brighton, on 12 October 1984 during the annual Conservative Party Conference, where, it understands, five people were murdered and 34 others injured in the terrorist attack by the IRA; understands that the objective of the bombing was to assassinate members of the UK Government, including the Prime Minister; notes that people living in Eastwood and Scotland were in attendance at the conference and made use of the Grand Hotel; remembers that one of the five people who died was a Scot, and wife of Sir Donald Maclean, Muriel Maclean, who tragically passed away from her injuries five weeks after the bombing; believes that engaging in murderous terrorist activity to achieve political ends is completely unacceptable in all cases and must always be unreservedly condemned by everyone who cherishes democracy, and further believes that terrorist attacks to weaken systems of democracy must always fail and never be allowed to succeed.

17:31

Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con): I thank colleagues who chose to support my motion. There are some events that people are party to that they never forget. As somebody who was in Brighton the night that the bomb exploded, I can say that that is one for me. It is not something that I have talked about very much publicly, but, as I get older, I felt that now was perhaps the time to put on record my experience of that night and my reflections on what it meant for politics in this country, all the way through to Jo Cox, David Amess and colleagues in the chamber who, I know, have been subject to—not always publicly but privately—real harassment and concern.

I will start 10 years before the events of 1984, as it is important to put into context the troubles in Northern Ireland, which underpinned all the difficulties in the United Kingdom at that time. In 1974, a bomb blew up in the Horse and Groom pub in Guildford. The 50th anniversary of that event took place last weekend. Among the victims that night were two Scots Guards—two young boys aged 17 and 18 who lived in Barrhead in East Renfrewshire. They lived in the same street, at number 18 and number 11. They had been in the Boys Brigade together. They had been in the same school football team. They had worked in Armitage Shanks together. They had a joint

funeral, and they lie together in the cemetery adjacent to each other to this day.

With people serving in the armed forces, the troubles of that era came very close to home in many communities in Scotland. However, for two young boys, hardly out of school, who had joined the army, to be cut down in that way had a great effect on my local community.

Ten years later, I was at my sixth party conference. All of us here will have been at our respective party conferences. They were very open affairs at that time. Yes, there was a certain amount of policing, but that was more to marshal demonstrators. The policing was not in any sense concerned that there was a genuine threat to life.

On that day—12 October 1984, which will be commemorated this Saturday—I was in the bar of the Grand hotel until about 1 o'clock. I then went back to my digs with other people. In a way that I have never been properly able to explain, I woke up suddenly with a deep-seated sense of unease that something was not right. I could not put my finger on what that was; I just felt it. I said to the people with whom we were sharing accommodation, "Look, something's not right. Let's get up and go and see." We did that.

We were 100 yards away from the Grand hotel. We walked round and there was an extraordinary sight before us. The only parallel that I could think of at the time was the disaster at Clarkston that had taken place in the early 1970s, when a landmark that we were familiar with was suddenly ripped apart in front of us. There it was: the Grand hotel, with a gaping slash down it.

We did what we could. We brought deck chairs up from the beach to let people who were staggering out, covered in soot and dust, sit down. However, in due course, we realised that that was really as much as we could do, and the emergency services had to be left to get on with things.

We knew that the Prime Minister had survived but, in an age before digital communications, it was difficult to know anything else whatsoever. However, what we understood was that there had been an attempt to wipe out the democratically elected Government of the United Kingdom. It did not matter which political party people were in or whether they were fans of Margaret Thatcher—let us face it: not many political parties were fans of hers—they all stood together and understood at that moment that this was an act of terror the like of which we had not seen in the country before and that, had it been successful, it would have had profound implications. Indeed, even though it was unsuccessful, it had profound implications.

The bomb was behind the bath panel in room 629, which was occupied by my friend Donald

Maclean—the president of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Association—and his wife, Muriel. I had seen Muriel just two nights before, when she hosted the Scottish reception—I remember her still, with the Maclean sash. She was a lovely woman.

They were catapulted six floors down. Muriel died a few weeks later from the injuries that she sustained, along with four other people. Donald was horribly scarred. For the rest of his life, he carried the injuries that he suffered that night with tremendous fortitude and courage.

I remember the sense of leadership, irrespective of politics, that the Prime Minister showed the following day. I remember journalists saying to me, “She put the spine back into us, as well.” Everybody was shaken by the enormity of that event.

The bombing led to a change in our politics. Before then, we could go to party conferences and mix and mingle with politicians without there being any real security. However, from that moment onwards—as I saw in the conferences that I attended afterwards—a curtain came down on the way that politicians at the most senior level could engage with people. Over the years since, that has come to affect all of us, too.

Jo Cox was cut down in 2016 and David Amess was cut down a few years later, and I know that there are colleagues in this chamber whose constituency offices have been attacked as they have gone about their daily business. Last week, a woman attacked my office—she attacked the staff in the shared services area of the building. She was arrested by the police, was on remand for three nights and has been charged. These things visit all of us and have changed the colour and character of politics. They have made us all aware of something that we never thought that we would ever have to be aware of. That is the long shadow that has carried forward from that night in Brighton all those years ago.

There is one positive thing that I remember. On the 25th anniversary of the bomb, the fireman who had dug Donald Maclean out of the rubble contacted me and asked whether I could put him in touch with Donald, whom he had not met since that night. They were able to meet, and I think that it meant a great deal to Donald, who passed away the following year. Humanity finds its way through, even in the most awful of circumstances and tragedies. That is what I choose to think and celebrate.

That night gave me a determination that terrorism must never be allowed to succeed. That does not mean that we cannot confront the giant issues that trouble us. However, when it comes down to it, we have to stand together as politicians

and recognise that democracy is a fragile thing and that it will succeed only if we stand together, work together and are resolute.

17:40

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): Before I start, I pay tribute to Jackson Carlaw for his powerful speech, in which he talked about his recollection of those times.

Although there are many differences among members of all parties here, I am completely confident in saying that we are united in our belief that democracy and our politics should be peaceful. This weekend will mark the 40th anniversary of an attempt to disrupt our democratic system and inject political violence and terrorism into our civic lives. Disagreement and debate are part of a healthy democracy; planting bombs in hotels in order to target political leaders is not.

The five individuals who lost their lives that night were Anthony Berry MP; Jeanne Shattock; Muriel Maclean, who was mentioned earlier in the debate; Eric Taylor; and Roberta Wakeham. Although it is right that we remember those who died, as Jackson Carlaw said, we must also remember those who were injured—most famously, Margaret Tebbit, the wife of Norman, who spent the rest of her life in a wheelchair, but also the more than 30 others who were treated for various injuries as a result of the blast. So many lives were affected by that grotesque attempt to disrupt our political system.

It is only fair that we pay special tribute to the members of Sussex Police and East Sussex Fire Brigade who were the first on the scene. Their heroic actions saved many lives, as did the work of all emergency service workers who were present that night.

I commend the resilience that those who experienced the attack, including Jackson Carlaw, displayed by continuing the party conference merely hours after it had taken place. Garret FitzGerald, the Irish Prime Minister at the time, summed up the attack as

“a gross miscalculation of the character of the British people and the nature of British democracy.”

It is important to underline that the attack cannot be seen as a reflection on the Irish community in the UK. Such attacks can often increase intercommunity tensions. Inflammatory articles such as one in the *Sunday Express* that asked

“Wouldn’t you rather admit to being a pig than to being Irish?”

did nothing to mend relations and acknowledge that the Irish Republican Army’s actions horrified the majority of the Irish community. The IRA does

not represent the views of the Irish community any more than any terrorist group represents the views of other people. That is important to me, as the member for the Coatbridge and Chryston constituency, which has a large Irish community that has often faced discrimination over the years. I know that the Irish community in Coatbridge at that time completely condemned the horrific attack.

In considering the legacy of the attack, we must realise that, today, many people across Scotland and, indeed, the wider UK will be too young to recall the political violence associated with Northern Ireland during the troubles. We cannot take for granted the fact that more and more generations have not had to live through those violent times.

On that October night 40 years ago, few would have believed that, within 15 years, an extensive peace process would have led to the ground-breaking terms of the Good Friday agreement. That mammoth agreement required mutual trust, co-operation and a sincere belief in renouncing violence and investing in a better future for all. There are lessons that we can learn from that today. It is understandable that people look at the situations unfolding in the middle east, Ukraine and Sudan and think that there is no hope—we all feel that sometimes—but history has shown that, with determined efforts, peace can be achieved. That has held true in Northern Ireland, as well as in other regions that have seen years of political violence, such as Colombia and South Africa.

I close by once again unequivocally condemning the attack, asserting that violence has no place in our democratic system and agreeing with the sentiments of Jackson Carlaw, and all colleagues who will speak tonight, in expressing our condolences for those who were affected, injured or killed 40 years ago.

17:44

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I thank Jackson Carlaw for speaking about a personal event that, I think, shook us all in 1984. For me, it was the culmination of a long line of IRA atrocities that, as he said, were euphemistically known as the troubles, but it was more than that.

We need to remember that, in the build-up to that event, for the IRA, terrorism was the threat of action designed to influence the Government by intimidating the public, and that is what happened on that day. I had experienced that two years and three months earlier, when my regiment experienced the Hyde park bombing.

I will give a reminder to those members who do not know about that event. A bomb was made by Danny McNamee and planted in a blue Morris

Marina on the south carriageway of Hyde park. John Downey sat on a bench about 300m from where the car was parked and waited until the horses rode past—waiting for the most opportune moment to explode it, killing Anthony Daly, Roy Bright, Jeffrey Young and Simon Tipper, as well as seven horses. I am not sure what possessed him to think that blowing up people in ceremonial armour was ever going to take his argument further forward. It was a calculated decision, in the same way as the Brighton bombing was a calculated decision, with the bomb planted much earlier and planned to go off in the middle of the night to cause maximum devastation.

Patrick Magee, who planted the Brighton bomb, said afterwards, when he had talked to the families, that, having listened to them, he could never do it again. I think that that is a message for all terrorists: you will never achieve what you want to do by intimidating the public—listen to those people who tried, and please do not ever do it again. That is my message: it is not right to attack unarmed people and try to subvert democracy, especially in the United Kingdom.

17:47

Tim Eagle (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I am honoured to speak today in support of my colleague Jackson Carlaw's motion on the Brighton bombing—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Can we have Mr Eagle's microphone, please?

Tim Eagle: Sorry, Presiding Officer—my bad. I am not prepared today, am I?

Although I have very few memories of the bombing myself, as I was only four at the time, I have many friends and family members who live in the south-east of England, and I remember visiting Brighton as a child. While my pre-school mind was, I am sure, fixated on the doughnuts and rides of Brighton pier, I can recall my grandparents speaking about and pointing at the hotel every time that we passed it.

It is amazing how, when I heard that Jackson Carlaw had lodged the motion for debate, the feelings, thoughts and memories of my parents and my grandparents talking about that event in the past came rushing back to me. We should never forget that such events, including the many others that, sadly, we have seen in the UK, leave lasting memories, injuries and suffering.

As other members have mentioned, 34 people were injured in the terrorist attack by the IRA, and many were left with life-changing injuries. That included Lord and Lady Tebbit, who have been mentioned already. Lady Tebbit was in hospital for two years following the bomb, and her injuries

meant that she was severely paralysed for the rest of her life. Lord Tebbit recovered in hospital for three months and subsequently gave up his parliamentary seat in 1992 to care for his wife.

Lady Tebbit was remarkable. When she was recording “Desert Island Discs” with Sue Lawley in 1995, she said that she did not “blame people”, remarking,

“I don’t completely forget or forgive, but one has to completely look forward.”

She described how, recovering in the spinal unit, she felt lucky, as there were always people who were so much worse off than her, and that at least she was 50, and she was so grateful that she could still simply communicate. Sue Lawley said that Lady Tebbit

“shows no trace of bitterness, simply an acute eye for the needs of those who, like her, become the victims of sudden terrible injuries.”

Lady Tebbit died in 2020, and Lord Tebbit is now 93; I pay tribute to them both.

While preparing for the debate and re-reading the details of the immediate aftermath of the bomb in the Grand hotel, I was shocked to learn just how close the Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, had been to being injured or killed herself in the blast. It is extraordinary that the Prime Minister, her husband and her private secretary were unhurt, and it is equally extraordinary—as Jackson Carlaw said—that the conference went ahead as planned that day. As the Prime Minister said in her conference speech that afternoon,

“The fact that we are gathered here, now—shocked but composed and determined—is a sign not only that this attack has failed but that all attempts to destroy democracy will fail.”

What is equally extraordinary is that the Prime Minister continued with the on-going talks with the Irish Government, as she must have been deeply and personally impacted by the attacks, deaths and injuries.

I whole-heartedly support my colleague Jackson Carlaw’s belief, as set out in his motion,

“that engaging in murderous terrorist activity to achieve political ends is completely unacceptable ... and ... that terrorist attacks to weaken systems of democracy must always fail and never be allowed to succeed.”

I will, therefore, quote the powerful and eloquent response to the Brighton bomb attack that Labour MP Gerald Kaufman gave in the House of Commons. He said:

“Let us be quite clear about what happened at the Grand hotel in Brighton on 12 October. This was no random act of violence. It cannot be compared, and it should not be compared, with any other act of violence, great or small, that takes place within our society. This was a deliberate attempt to destroy a Government by mass murder. Yes, that Government are a Conservative Government with

whom we have the most serious differences, but they are a democratically elected Government. They are the British Government. Let it be said in the plainest terms that the only way that we get rid of a Government in Britain is by the ballot box. Terrorism and assassination have no place whatever in the political process in this country. We utterly and unanimously reject them and we shall fight with every fibre of our being against them.”—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 22 October 1984; Vol 65, c 441.]

I thank my colleague Jackson Carlaw for bringing this important debate, and his powerful message, to the chamber today.

17:51

Paul O’Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): I begin by respectfully acknowledging Jackson Carlaw’s bringing the motion to Parliament for debate. For him, and for Conservative colleagues, I appreciate that it is a very emotive subject, given not only the personal connections that many had to the victims of the bombing, but their long-standing connections to the families of those victims and to those who survived that terrible night.

We debate the anniversary as the current party conference season has just concluded. It has caused me to reflect, having attended my own party’s gathering in Liverpool just weeks ago, on the magnitude and the horror of what happened 40 years ago in Brighton. That has been recounted by Jackson Carlaw this evening in a very personal and powerful way, and I commend him for his speech.

I often reflect that political parties become something like an extended family—the good, the bad and the in-between—and it is hard to imagine those whom we come to care about so deeply being killed or harmed in such circumstances. Party conferences are part of the lifeblood of our democratic traditions, so when terrorism strikes at the heart of our democracy in such a direct way and claims innocent lives, it must be condemned. I think that, this evening, we stand united across the chamber in that condemnation.

Many members in the chamber will know that the troubles in Northern Ireland and the long road to peace are very personal to me and to my family. Tonight, we remember victims of that conflict: the thousands who were killed across these islands, many of whom were just innocent bystanders living their everyday lives.

Every corner was touched by those dark days: my own family in County Derry and County Tyrone, and the soldiers whose names are etched on the war memorials in towns and villages such as the one that I live in today. I join Jackson Carlaw in reflecting on the other anniversary that we have commemorated in the past week: the 50th anniversary of when John Hunter and Billy Forsyth from Barrhead were killed in the Guildford

bombings, aged just 17 and 18. They were on their first deployment in the Army—just young, innocent men who were on a night out. There was, of course, the pain of the miscarriages of justice and the search for answers that followed. It is important to reflect on the pain that is caused—that pain is unimaginable, and I know that so many people still carry it today.

Decades ago, it was unimaginable that an end to the darkness was possible, but today the light of peace shines across Northern Ireland. There are—as we heard from other members—adults in their mid-20s who have known nothing else. Peace can be fragile, and it can be confusing. It requires compromises that can feel impossible to make, but for those young people, it must endure and succeed.

Tonight, we in the chamber should remember those people who made it possible. We should remember the forbearance of John Hume; the groundwork that was laid by John Major in the most difficult of circumstances; and the empathy of Mo Mowlam in delivering the Good Friday agreement.

The next step on that journey is reconciliation. Again, that is a hard road to embark on, and it is difficult for many to contemplate. However, I am sure that many will also agree that the examples that have been set in the work of people such as Jo Berry—the daughter of Sir Anthony Berry, who died in the blast—and Pat Magee, who planted the bomb, are an important starting point.

I leave the chamber with the words of the late Queen, on her historic visit to Ireland:

“These events have touched us all, many of us personally, and are a painful legacy. We can never forget those who have died or been injured, and their families. To all those who have suffered as a consequence of our troubled past I extend my sincere thoughts and deep sympathy.

With the benefit of historical hindsight we can all see things which we would wish had been done differently or not at all. But it is also true that no-one who looked to the future over the past centuries could have imagined the strength of the bonds that are now in place between the Governments and the people of our two nations, the spirit of partnership that we now enjoy, and the lasting rapport between us.”

I express my condolences to those still living in pain and with loss, and I offer my hope for an ongoing commitment to peace, democracy and reconciliation across these islands.

17:56

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I commend my friend Jackson Carlaw for securing the debate on what is a very important anniversary, and I congratulate him on his moving

contribution. Indeed, all members who have spoken have made very fine contributions.

Unlike Jackson Carlaw, I was not present at the Grand hotel in 1984. At that stage, I was far too young to be allowed out on my own, and I was not even a member of the Conservative Party. However, I remember that date well. I still remember the television pictures that were broadcast of the events of that night, including the anguished face of a pyjama-clad Norman Tebbit, who was carried on a stretcher from the ruins. As we have heard, Margaret Tebbit suffered more than he did. She fell through four floors and ended up paralysed from the chest down, having to spend the rest of her life in a wheelchair—which probably contributed to a premature end to Norman Tebbit’s political career, although I am pleased to say that he is still with us.

As we have heard, five individuals died that night: Sir Anthony Berry, Roberta Wakeham, Eric Taylor, Lady Shattock—who was decapitated instantly following the blast—and Muriel Maclean, whom Jackson Carlaw had the privilege of knowing and who was the wife of Donald Maclean. I never met Muriel Maclean, but I met Sir Donald, as he became, on a number of subsequent occasions.

The target of the attack was the Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher. She survived, but it was a close-run thing, because the bathroom of the room that she shared with Denis Thatcher was destroyed. Had she been in the bathroom at the time of the blast, she would almost certainly have been badly injured, if not killed—which was, of course, the intention of the IRA bombers. It was an extremely close-run thing.

The following morning, Margaret Thatcher attended the Conservative Party conference and received an instant standing ovation. She made a very brave and famous speech that afternoon, concluding

“all attempts to destroy democracy by terrorism will fail.”

A person does not need to be a fan of Margaret Thatcher or even a Conservative to agree with that sentiment.

There is perhaps a certain symmetry to the fact that we are holding a debate to recognise that anniversary just a couple of days after the first anniversary of the horrific terrorist attack on Israel by Hamas—Israel being the only fully functioning democracy in the middle east. However, whatever the terrorist organisation—the IRA, Hamas, Hezbollah or any other—we should be very clear that terrorism must always be confronted and must not be allowed to succeed. As we reflect on the memory and sacrifice of those who were killed in the Brighton bombing 40 years ago, we should all

hold fast to that principle and resolve that democracy must prevail.

17:59

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I thank my colleague Jackson Carlaw for bringing this debate to Parliament and for his moving personal recollection.

I remember well the bombing, and recall the sight of Norman Tebbit, grey with dust, being carried out on a stretcher. It is an image that those of us who were around at the time cannot erase. It symbolised the horror of that day.

I had, and have, little regard for Margaret Thatcher as a political leader. Her bombastic approach to politics at a domestic and international level was confrontational by choice and often destructive, but I was horrified by the bomb attack that was directed at her, which killed others and injured many.

Like Jackson Carlaw, I will put that time into context. I recall when the troubles resurfaced in Northern Ireland as I had just married and moved to Galloway. It was 1969. I recall when the British troops went into Northern Ireland. At first, they were offered cups of tea, but that soon turned to resentment from half of the Belfast population. Even then, I wondered how the troops would leave and when. Moving in was the easy part; not having an exit strategy is a continuing error of successive UK Governments. I recall farming families relocating to Galloway from the Irish border to remove themselves from the firing line, saddened that neighbour could no longer trust neighbour. Catholics and Protestants who had lived side by side were now taking sides.

The decades came and went. We received Ulster Television at the time. Almost every night, there were announcements of incendiary devices, often on the Armagh Road. I was perhaps more aware of the realities of the divisions in Northern Ireland than people in other parts of the UK. In March 1979, Airey Neave, the then shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, was assassinated by the Irish National Liberation Army in a car bomb attack in the Palace of Westminster car park. He was a friend and political mentor to Margaret Thatcher.

On 27 August 1979, less than four months after Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister, Lord Mountbatten was killed by a bomb on his fishing boat off the coast of Mullaghmore, County Sligo, in the Irish Republic. The Provisional Irish Republican Army—the IRA—had planted the device. On the same day, the IRA also killed 18 British soldiers near Warrenpoint with two bombs, which was the highest loss of life suffered in a

single incident by the British Army during the troubles. Northern Ireland was a war zone. Extremism thrived.

In March 1981, Bobby Sands, an IRA member, who was imprisoned at Maze prison in Northern Ireland, went on a hunger strike for the return of special category status to prisoners, which would have given those prisoners the status of political prisoners rather than criminals. That included their not having to wear a prison uniform and being able to freely associate with other prisoners. While on hunger strike, Bobby Sands stood in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone by-election and won. At that time, Margaret Thatcher said:

“There can be no question of political status for someone who is serving a sentence for crime. Crime is crime is crime: it is not political, it is crime, and there can be no question of granting political status.”

Ten men died of starvation before the strike came to an end. Sands was the first to die, which he did on 5 May 1981, after 66 days of starvation. His death led to rioting in Republican areas of Northern Ireland.

I refer to those events not to make value judgments but to place the attempted assassination of Margaret Thatcher and her Cabinet in the context of that dreadful time. That said, there were wrongs and cruelties on all sides and an abject failure of politics, which, as ever, even today in Israel, Gaza and Lebanon, mean death and injury, with ordinary people caught in the middle.

In the end, as in Ireland, after all the bloodshed, comes compromise and a political solution—in this instance, it was the Good Friday agreement. That is why, as politicians, while we deplore the use of the bullet rather than the ballot box, we must ensure that engagement with democracy does not falter through our actions or, perhaps even more crucially, our inaction.

That said, we must, without fear or favour, condemn violence whenever, but in today's context, we must condemn that directed towards politicians, whether we agree with their views or not—indeed, more so if we disagree. If the assassination of Margaret Thatcher had succeeded, it would not, in my view, have resolved the troubles, but it would have succeeded in undermining our democracy.

As others have said, today, politicians here operate in a culture in which they are seen by some as fair game, even to the point of threats, violence and worse. The events of that early morning in Brighton remind us that democracy is vulnerable, fragile and has its dangers, but those are far outweighed by its freedoms, which we must all always protect.

I thank Jackson Carlaw for this debate and for reminding me of those difficult days and of how far Northern Ireland has come. If—it is an if—it is to be a united Ireland, it will be achieved through the ballot box, not by bomb or bullet.

18:05

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): I thank Jackson Carlaw for a powerful and memorable speech—probably the best speech that I have ever heard delivered in the chamber as a member.

I have been a member of the Conservative Party since I was 15. You develop a strange emotional attachment to the party to which you have belonged for nearly 50 years. In and out of government, our party has had its finest and not-so-fine moments, but that is politics. What happened in the early hours of 12 October 1984 was not politics; it was the attempted mass murder of ordinary members of the Conservative Party and a terrorist attack aimed at killing the Prime Minister and the Cabinet. It was a shocking assault on people—people like us; people like those of us who attended the Conservative Party conference last week in Birmingham.

I was not at the 1984 conference. My first Conservative Party conference was in 1977, but I was not at the 1984 conference because Yvonne and I were new parents and I was still a student at the University of Stirling. That morning, we watched breakfast TV, transfixed at the horror that was before us. In 1984, breakfast TV was still a new thing. They were on air, providing us with live pictures of the rescue of the survivors from the bombed building.

As has been said, the front of the Grand hotel had been blown completely away, and we watched on television, among the ruins, as has been referenced, Norman Tebbit being carefully extracted from the wreckage. Fred Bishop, the fire station officer on duty that night, was handling the slow descent of Norman Tebbit's stretcher. Famously, Norman Tebbit cried out at one point, "Get off my bloody feet, Fred", but Fred Bishop, a man of uncommon character, in the middle of all of that, chatted with Tebbit about flying. Tebbit had been a pilot and an official of the British Airline Pilots Association. As Fred and others tried to bring Tebbit down the floors of the hotel, there was an imminent risk of collapse. Tebbit was not told and did not know how gravely his wife had been injured.

We already knew—particularly those of us who were active Conservatives—about Margaret Thatcher's formidable courage and conviction. I believe that she is a historic figure for all times. She was asked live on TV by the BBC political

editor John Cole whether the conference would go ahead. She swivelled around, and facing John Cole, she spoke slowly and deliberately and said,

"The conference will go on".

As if to make her point, she repeated it:

"John, the conference will go on, as usual".

There have already been references in the debate to what she said later that day in her conference speech. The wreckage of the nearby Grand hotel was still smouldering, and the dead and injured were still being identified and tended to. I conclude with an extended quote from what she said:

"The bomb attack on the Grand Hotel early this morning was, first and foremost, an inhuman, indiscriminating attempt to massacre innocent, unsuspecting men and women staying in Brighton for our Conservative conference. Our first thoughts must, at once, be for those who died and for those who are now in hospital, recovering from their injuries.

But the bomb attack clearly signified more than this. It was an attempt not only to disrupt and terminate our conference; it was an attempt to cripple Her Majesty's democratically elected Government. That is the scale of the outrage in which we have all shared, and the fact that we are gathered here now, shocked but composed and determined, is a sign not only that this attack has failed, but that all attempts to destroy democracy by terrorism will fail."

The lesson of Brighton to those of evil intent, who trade in horror and the work of death for their own ends, can be simply put: all attempts to destroy democracy by terrorism will fail. Our resolve to that end must remain.

18:10

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Jamie Hepburn): I express my gratitude to Jackson Carlaw for bringing a motion for debate in recognition of the 40th anniversary of the bombing at the Grand hotel in Brighton on 12 October 1984. I commend him for speaking about an event that, for most of us, is a profoundly important public one. The manner in which he addressed us reminds us that, for many people, it is not only a public event but a profoundly and deeply personal one. I was very moved by his contribution.

It is hard to find words that are adequate to respond to the enormity of the circumstances and to the awful senselessness of the violence of that event on 12 October 1984. Nonetheless, we have an opportunity to place on record our collective condolences to the families of all those who were killed, injured and affected by the bombing, which was one of the most significant attacks by the Provisional Irish Republican Army in mainland Britain.

I cannot begin to imagine—I hope never to have to imagine—the depth of the loss for those

impacted by such sudden violence. Using violence to achieve political ends, no matter what those might be, is intolerable in any free society and it is right that we mark this anniversary.

Sadly, that was not the only incident in these islands in the past 40 years in which violence was inflicted on those involved in the political process. We are grateful that, during the period known as the troubles, which had its own impact here in Scotland, a fragile peace was struck in Northern Ireland following the 1998 Good Friday agreement and are further grateful that that peace holds to this day.

Today's debate allows us to recognise and remember other politicians who have lost their lives while carrying out their public duties and listening to and representing the people they were elected to serve, which is the honour and sacred duty at the heart of our democracy. Ian Gow MP was killed by a bomb placed under his car, outside his home, on 30 July 1990. Jo Cox MP was shot, stabbed and killed as she was about to hold her constituency surgery on 16 June 2016. Sir David Amess MP was stabbed and killed while holding a surgery on 15 October 2021.

As a means of honouring those who have lost their lives, it is essential that we do not allow acts of terrorism—whatever end they may be motivated by—to succeed in undermining democracy. Terrorism can never be accepted, and we must challenge it together, using methods that do not compromise our respect for the rule of law and for human rights.

Sadly, there are still threats to elected members as they go about their democratic duties at both local and national level. We know that that happens to some of us here. Jackson Carlaw mentioned a horrible recent event and I say to him that I am sorry that he experienced that. We know that such things have happened to others here, too. Such threats cannot be tolerated.

Even when such actions do not breach the criminal threshold, they can still represent a direct challenge to the democratic process, so they must be vigorously opposed at every turn. We must protect our democratic processes. The Government has systems in place that seek to ensure the integrity of elections as well as the personal safety of elected members at the national and local level.

National and local elections remain safe and secure, with robust processes in place that bring together Government departments, devolved Administrations, local government, the intelligence community and wider operational partners. During the recent election, all candidates were able to access comprehensive election security guidance that brought together expertise from across the

security community, including the police, the National Protective Security Authority, the National Cyber Security Centre and others, to help them to implement quick and effective personal protective security measures. Candidates were also able to access protective security awareness under operation Bridger, with Police Scotland supporting any additional sessions for Scottish candidates where required.

Although the threat towards candidates is often heightened during election periods, it does not dissipate once they are elected. We must remain vigilant as we represent our constituencies and promote our political campaigns. I therefore encourage every member to familiarise themselves with the available protective security resources, both for individuals and political parties.

Any democratic society must be able to operate on the basis of being able to exchange and debate divergent points vigorously, without rancour, and always free from subversion by illegitimate means. It is our collective responsibility as elected representatives and democrats to ensure that we strive to that end.

I conclude by thanking Jackson Carlaw again for the motion and allowing us to respectfully mark the 40th anniversary of the Brighton bombing, to allow us to convey our sympathy and condolences to those who were directly impacted and, more widely, to enable us to reassert that political intimidation, violence and abuse have no place in our society.

Meeting closed at 18:17.

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