



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament (Hybrid)

**Thursday 25 June 2020**

**Session 5**



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# Scottish Parliament

Thursday 25 June 2020

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

## Portfolio Question Time

### Health and Sport

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Lewis Macdonald):** Good afternoon, and welcome to this virtual meeting of the Scottish Parliament. The first item of business is portfolio questions on health and sport. I remind members that, if they wish to request a supplementary question, they should enter the letter "R" during the relevant question.

We will start on this occasion, with question 2, and we will come back to question 1 in a moment.

#### Delayed Operations (Waiting Times)

2. **Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it will take to minimise waiting times for delayed operations. (S5O-04437)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman):** In line with our recently published framework for remobilising our health services, "Re-mobilise, Recover, Re-design: the Framework for NHS Scotland", health boards are following national and clinical advice to safely and gradually prioritise resumption of some paused services, while also retaining sufficient capacity to respond to Covid-19. That work will be supported by specific recently agreed actions, including an extension of the use of independent sector capacity to support health boards by ensuring that we have Covid-free sites for urgent and cancer patients to be treated.

From 1 July, the NHS Golden Jubilee hospital will resume key services, including in orthopaedics, ophthalmology and cardiology. That includes continued support for vital and complex cancer services.

We have published a surgical recovery framework to enable health boards to provide cancer services through the next stages of Covid-19, and we are assisting boards in planning where new health, safety and social distancing measures have been put in place. We are also developing further pathways for the NHS Louisa Jordan hospital so that patients who have not been seen will wait for less time. That includes patients who are waiting for diagnostics testing and orthopaedic procedures.

It is important to remember that we are still dealing with—[Inaudible.] It has not gone away, and restarting paused services has to be measured against the need—[Inaudible.]

**Miles Briggs:** What plans do ministers have to invite back newly retired surgeons and anaesthetists to be part of that additional capacity? The cabinet secretary mentioned NHS Louisa Jordan, and, this week, it was said that the Nightingale hospitals will remain on standby. I take it that that will also be the case in Scotland and that no plans have been drawn up to decommission that hospital in Glasgow?

**Jeane Freeman:** On the last point, there are no plans to decommission NHS Louisa Jordan. The member will remember that it has a capacity, if needed, of 1,000 beds, with the initial plan being that 300 of those beds would be needed for Covid-19. NHS Louisa Jordan will remain ready to deal with Covid-19 patients if that is necessary, but in the interim, given the current readiness of our other NHS estates and the current prevalence of the virus in the community, we are developing proposals to use NHS Louisa Jordan, as I said in my initial answer.

In relation to retired doctors of various types, the member will know that we had a significant response to our call, at the outset of the pandemic, for returning retired nurses, doctors, other clinical professions and social care workers, and those who had taken career breaks or sabbaticals. We still have those people on our books, and we have gone back to check with those whom we have not already deployed whether they are willing to stay available, so that we know we have those additional resources on hand should we need them.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you. We return to question 1. I thank Rona Mackay for her patience.

#### Chronic Pain (Resumption of Treatment)

1. **Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government when chronic pain patients will be able to resume receiving treatment that has been suspended because of the Covid-19 lockdown. (S5O-04436)

**The Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing (Joe FitzPatrick):** I apologise for losing connection earlier, and I thank the member for the question. Coronavirus has had an unprecedented impact across all our public services. We know that it is a worrying time, and we are aware of the difficulties and challenges that it has caused for people who live with chronic pain. Therefore, we are looking to re-establish those services in the next phase.

We have announced that we are moving to phase 2 of the route map out of lockdown, and health boards have been planning for that remobilisation of services in line with “Re-mobilise, Recover, Re-design: the framework for NHS Scotland”, which we published on 31 May. We have outlined that it should start with the expansion of non-cancer urgent in-patient and out-patient services. That will mean the gradual reintroduction of some chronic disease management from 6 July, which could include pain services.

How different specialties categorise and prioritise the urgency of cases will be informed by guidance from professional bodies and local circumstances.

We have also published a patient information leaflet about coronavirus for people who live with chronic pain. It includes a list of available services, and it can be accessed on the Scottish Government’s website.

**Rona Mackay:** I thank the minister for that answer. At a recent meeting of the cross-party group on chronic pain, patients told of their suffering during lockdown as a result of the lack of access to pain clinics. Some patients were forced to travel south of the border and pay privately for treatment. They also said that, even before lockdown, access to clinics for treatment was a postcode lottery. Can the cabinet secretary confirm whether, as we come out of lockdown, the wider issues surrounding chronic pain treatment will be looked at, particularly with regard to patient representation on the national advisory committee and the implementation of a national framework to address long-standing issues?

**Joe FitzPatrick:** I am aware that some people have made that decision to travel to England for private healthcare. During lockdown, the national health service was on an emergency footing, and it remains so in phase 2. Emergency and urgent care has been and is being provided, including treatment for pain as a result of emergency, acute presentations, infusion pumps for palliative care and treatment for complex regional pain syndrome.

Health boards have triaged cases locally on the basis of clinical need, and, as we move into the second stage, health boards and stakeholders will explore a national consensus on the approach to further widen that capacity.

The present national advisory committee is paused while its members focus on responding to the current public health emergency, so that front-line services, including third sector organisations, can concentrate on providing care and support to people in Scotland. It is challenging for that group of people, but my colleagues in Government and I

understand their concerns and will work with our health boards to make sure that the issue is treated as a priority. However, it will have to be done in a way that is safe and in line with recommendations and clinical advice.

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** NHS boards have been reporting that, even after lockdown ends, because of the increased safety measures that they will have to put in place, they will be able to work only at approximately 50 per cent of their capacity. How will the Scottish Government deal with the increasing waiting lists for those who suffer with chronic pain?

**Joe FitzPatrick:** When people are suffering from chronic pain, any wait must be intolerable. Throughout the coronavirus situation, we have looked at a number of methods to provide people with support—the NHS near me clinics are an example of that. We need to look at what we have learned through phase 1 to see how we can continue to support people better and perhaps in different ways. However, that will always have to be based on clinical guidance and what is safe.

**Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab):** Rona Mackay raised the issue of patients travelling south of the border to access treatment. Will the Scottish Government reimburse individuals who have done that?

On the issue of the postcode lottery—which existed before Covid-19—is the minister aware that patients in some health boards, such as NHS Grampian, cannot access treatments such as infusion treatments? Is that fair? What will he do to end that postcode lottery and inequality across Scotland for patients with chronic pain?

**Joe FitzPatrick:** It is really important that people get the clinical support that they need, and that should be worked out between them and their clinicians. In some cases, we support people to go elsewhere in the UK or within Scotland to get treatment. If someone makes a personal decision to seek private treatment without liaising with the health board, I am not sure that it would be easy for us to support that. I encourage people who need support urgently to contact their clinician and see how that support can be provided by the NHS. That would be my advice to anyone in that situation.

### **Shielding (Categorisation and Support)**

**3. Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government who decides what categories of people are shielded from Covid-19 and what level of support they are entitled to. (S5O-04438)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman):** The chief medical officers of the United Kingdom’s four nations agreed at the

outset the categories of those who are at the highest clinical risk and should shield. In addition, clinicians can identify people who they think are in the high-risk category but who do not come under the group of conditions identified by the chief medical officers, and they can add those patients to the list. The Scottish Government has worked with key partners and local authorities to provide a comprehensive package of support, including an SMS system and local phone lines for access to free deliveries of food and household items, which are delivered to individuals' houses, priority delivery spots from supermarkets and the delivery of medication.

**Rhoda Grant:** A constituent has told me that, two weeks ago, the council contacted him offering assistance while he was shielding. He has had a health condition for many years. However, that was the first official notification that he had received that he should be shielding—some three months into lockdown. I contacted the council and was told that it receives updated lists of shielding persons every week. I can understand that people's health conditions change, however my constituent's health had not changed and he should have been on the first list. Luckily, he has coped, but many others in that situation might be without the support of friends and family. What is the Scottish Government doing to ensure that vulnerable people receive the help that they desperately need?

**Jeane Freeman:** On the latter part of Ms Grant's question, I have just outlined that. I should have also said that there is additional mental health and wellbeing support, which is supported nationally by the Government, complemented by what is available in each local area.

I do not know the details of the particular case that Ms Grant has told us about but, as always, if she wants to pass those details on to me I would be very happy to look into the case.

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** I am interested in advice for the over-70s, many of whom have been shielding unnecessarily for several months. We need some clarity for those people as the advice for those shielding and others is changing. When can we expect new guidance for the over-70s to be published?

**Jeane Freeman:** I am grateful to Mr Rennie for asking me that question because it is an area that I am very conscious of—I am conscious of it not only because I am health secretary, but because it is close to home. He is right that some people over 70 have, in effect, shielded themselves—just as others have not. It is important that our guidance is very clear.

As Mr Rennie will know, we have made a commitment to all those in the shielding category

that we will work through July to ensure that we can offer more bespoke advice, guidance and—undoubtedly—support to different clinical groups. Our clinical advisers are working on that now. As we do that, we will produce the right clarification of guidance for those who are over 70 or qualify for the flu vaccine, to ensure that we make clear the risks that those who are not in the shielding group face and, therefore, the steps that we are advising them to take. That is important to ensure that only people who are at the most extreme clinical risk from contracting the virus are asked to take what are very stringent shielding measures.

### **Covid-19 (Lessons)**

**4. David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government how the lessons learned from the Covid-19 outbreak will help to inform future outbreaks of the virus or other pandemics. (S5O-04439)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman):** Although we are still responding to the current pandemic, lessons are being learned and captured as we go—for example, on the supply and distribution of personal protective equipment across health and social care. A lessons-learned process for regional resilience partnerships and their member organisations has already commenced in order to capture key issues, share good practice and, ultimately, shape future planning and preparations.

As Mr Stewart knows, we also received very helpful feedback from stakeholders for the Health and Sport Committee's recent session on resilience and emergency preparedness. We will consider that feedback fully.

All those lessons are being factored in to the planning that is under way in case there is a resurgence in the number of cases during the current pandemic. They will, of course, also be factored in to any future pandemic planning that is undertaken, alongside a larger review of how we have responded to and dealt with the current pandemic.

**David Stewart:** The cabinet secretary will not need the predictive powers of the Brahan seer to know that Scotland will face—[Inaudible.]—restructuring to cope better in the future with serious health disasters. By creating a centre for disease control and prevention—[Inaudible.]—testing across a broad spectrum, to work with our universities to focus on vaccine redevelopment and, finally, to create industrial-level strategic PPE reserves.

**Jeane Freeman:** I apologise to Mr Stewart: I did not hear all of his question. I hope that I can give a helpful response, but if it misses any part of his

question, I will respond to him in writing as soon as I have the detail of his question.

One of the positive things that has come out of the current pandemic is the degree of co-operation that there has been between national and local government, the third sector and, importantly, our academic partners. I want to take all the necessary steps to ensure that that co-operation continues.

Thanks to the efforts of my colleague Mr McKee, industrial levels of PPE have begun to be produced domestically. He continues to look for other opportunities to secure a more resilient PPE supply chain, and he has also applied his mind and skill to our testing supply chain.

We have direct links to the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, so I am not certain that we need our own centre. It would be better to continue to co-operate with the European centre. Notwithstanding our being removed from the European Union against the wishes of the Scottish people, I very much hope that we will still be able to do that.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I ask for succinct supplementaries and answers so that we can get more members in.

#### **Testing and Tracing (Localised Approach)**

**5. Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on having a localised approach to Covid-19 testing and tracing. (S5O-04440)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman):** To an extent, we already have a localised approach, in that our test and protect system is built on local health protection teams, supplemented by the nationally co-ordinated contact tracing capacity. That enhances local expertise and is able to flex across the country to ensure that the capacity of local health protection teams can be increased where that is needed. The national contact tracing centre allows flexibility. We will of course continue to monitor and evaluate those arrangements as we proceed with the implementation of test and protect.

**Liam McArthur:** The cabinet secretary will be aware that time is of the essence in confirming test results and getting in touch with those who might have been in contact with someone who tests positive. In that sense, does she agree that—as far as possible—testing and tracing should be carried out at a local level, and will she therefore ensure that places such as Orkney have the equipment and capacity that they need to allow that to happen wherever possible?

**Jeane Freeman:** I absolutely agree with Mr McArthur. One of the key elements of test and

protect—or of any contact tracing and testing programme—has to be a continuous drive to reduce the turnaround time in the taking of the sample, processing it through the labs and getting the results back, so that people know whether they need to move to trace contacts.

If we need to do more for our island communities, we will most definitely consider that. If Mr McArthur has any particular suggestion, I am very happy to hear it.

We have commissioned some early work in anticipation of the opening up of tourism to ensure that we have adequate resilience around all the key tourist areas in Scotland—we are fortunate to have such a beautiful country that has so many of them. However, we are ensuring that we have the resilience that we need locally should we see a spike in cases in any of those areas.

#### **Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority Health and Social Care Workers (Covid-19 Risk Assessments)**

**7. Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government what proportion of BAME health and social care workers have been risk-assessed for Covid-19. (S5O-04442)

**The Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing (Joe FitzPatrick):** Risk assessments are carried out independently by health and social care employers and occupational health services.

International guidance for BAME health and social care staff specified that individual assessments and practical support should be offered to all BAME staff. We will update that guidance following engagement with BAME staff to ensure that it is culturally competent. Later, we will ask those staff how they were supported during the pandemic and if concerns are raised, we will ask employers to take urgent action. There are five strands of work under way to respond to the impact of Covid-19 on BAME communities; I will not rehearse them.

**Alison Johnstone:** I welcome the minister's response. However, the British Medical Association has warned that doctors across the United Kingdom have not been risk assessed. A poll of almost 7,500 doctors working in the UK found that 36 per cent were unaware of any risk assessment in their place of work, and only 11 per cent said that they had personally been risk assessed. What action can the minister take to ensure that health boards and care providers are conducting proper risk assessments for BAME staff?

**Joe FitzPatrick:** That issue is why it is really important that one of our five strands of work is about engaging with the BAME community to understand their experience. We are also looking

at how we can get better data in the workplace. However, listening and speaking directly to BAME staff is a really important part of ensuring not only that we get the language of the guidance right, but that the guidance is applied appropriately across Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you very much. My apologies to Bill Kidd, as that takes us to the end of this portfolio question time session on health and sport.

14:24

*Meeting suspended.*

14:30

*On resuming—*

## Communities and Local Government

### Food Fund

**1. Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how its food fund will continue to support groups who are most in need over the summer, including families with children who are eligible for free school meals. (S5O-04444)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government (Aileen Campbell):** On 16 June, the First Minister announced an additional £27.6 million in funding to local authorities to support those who are at risk over the summer months. Importantly, that funding will enable the continuation of free school meals provision to eligible families over the school holidays, and for that provision to be co-ordinated with wider support to families.

The funding will allow local authorities to continue to deliver a co-ordinated local response for those who are at risk, including supporting people who are having difficulty affording or accessing food, such as those who have been asked to self-isolate under the test and protect strategy.

The funding adds to the initial £30 million of food funding allocation to local authorities in April, and complements our efforts on community responses, including the allocation of £2.1 million to FareShare, which will continue to distribute food to community organisations during the summer months.

Our support to people in the shielding group is being maintained, with an additional £15 million being made available following the extension of the shielding period to the end of July.

Overall, more than £110 million has been invested directly in supporting people at risk to access food since the start of the pandemic.

**Dr Allan:** Will the cabinet secretary say more about how the additional funding will support whole families, as well as children who are on free school meals, and about how the investment will reach those who have difficulties not just in affording but in accessing food?

**Aileen Campbell:** The food fund guidance that was issued in April provides local authorities with flexibility in order that they can best meet local circumstances. The guidance included the principle of using the “whole household, whole need” approach.

We have given local authorities the flexibility to provide their allocation of £57 million in order that they can reach people in the most suitable ways, based on local need. That will enable local authorities to continue free school meals provision to eligible families over the school holidays, to co-ordinate that provision with wider support for families, and to support people who have difficulty affording or accessing food.

This is about giving local authorities flexibility and enabling them to determine their circumstances and how best to use the funding, in the circumstances. It is also about ensuring that the guiding principle is that we meet and support a whole household’s needs, taking the “whole household, whole need” approach.

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** I should mention that questions 1, 2 and 6 are grouped together, as are questions 4 and 5. Supplementary questions on the group of questions will be taken after all the questions.

### Addressing Hunger and Isolation (Funding)

**2. Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what funding it has provided to third sector and community organisations to address hunger and isolation during the Covid-19 crisis. (S5O-04445)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government (Aileen Campbell):** On 18 March, I announced £350 million of communities funding, which is comprised of eight funds, to ensure that local authorities, community groups and the third sector are able to support people and communities that are affected by Covid-19. Of the £70 million food fund, £10 million is being invested directly in third sector and local community responses.

Funding has also been allocated to the third sector for food provision from other Scottish Government funds that have been established to support community responses to the pandemic,

including more than £2.6 million from the wellbeing fund to 127 projects around Scotland, and £5.2 million from the supporting communities fund being provided to 124 organisations.

A national phone line to help people who are at increased risk and who have no other available support was launched on 14 April. The total number of callers who have accessed their local authority via the national helpline is 40,615.

**Ruth Maguire:** Volunteers from Fullarton community hub in my constituency are delivering 149 fresh meals each day, seven days per week, to people who are shielding. The hub has twice been refused third sector resilience funding, with no feedback on why its applications have not been approved.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that communities often know best how to help themselves, and that where they are meeting local needs and delivering what is asked of them we must ensure that they are resourced? Can she provide Fullarton community hub with any assistance on where it might obtain funding?

**Aileen Campbell:** First, I pay tribute to the phenomenal effort and response from Fullarton community hub, which is delivering food for vulnerable people in its area.

I agree with the principle that Ruth Maguire expressed—that communities know their own situations best. We have seen that happen across the whole country, where communities have been stepping up and ensuring local resilience. We are incredibly grateful for what they have been doing.

I understand that Fullarton community hub applied to the third sector resilience fund and that, although it was not successful, it was directed to support from Just Enterprise. I am pleased that the hub has now received funding through the wellbeing fund, which I hope will have helped it. However, I will undertake to communicate with Ruth Maguire on whether anything further can be done to support it, and to ensure that it is clear about why it did not meet the criteria for resilience funding, to enable it to move forward and to understand where it might next access funding. It seems that it has been able to access money from the wellbeing fund and was given support from Just Enterprise, but I will be happy to engage with Ruth Maguire on whether the Scottish Government can do anything more to help.

### Food Fund

6. **Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on whether the food fund is sufficient to support groups that are most in need over the summer, including families with children who are eligible for free school meals. (S5O-04449)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government (Aileen Campbell):** As I said in response to Dr Allan's earlier question, last week the First Minister announced an additional £27.6 million of funding for local authorities to support people who are at risk of hunger over the summer months.

Additional funding for provision of free school meals during the school holidays has been calculated, based on the latest data from local authorities on how many children are receiving free school meals and the average cost of such meals. Officials will continue to engage closely with local authorities to monitor spend and delivery in order to ensure that support reaches those who are most in need, and they will be sharing learning to improve delivery across the country.

Overall, since the start of the pandemic more than £110 million has been invested directly in supporting people who are at risk to access food.

**Sarah Boyack:** That support is very welcome, and fantastic work is being done in our communities. The cabinet secretary rightly mentioned the need to address whole-household needs. The Institute for Public Policy Research has suggested that 100,000 families in Scotland are in serious financial difficulty and are struggling to pay for food or other essential items. We also know that some families are in unsuitable accommodation, without access to cooking facilities.

What does the cabinet secretary think of antipoverty groups' suggestion that the Scottish Government should urgently provide lump-sum payments of £250 per child to low-income families this summer, to enable them to end food poverty and get their families through the pandemic?

**Aileen Campbell:** I acknowledge Sarah Boyack's interest in and continued pursuit of the issue, to ensure that people are supported over the summer. I hope that the resources that the Scottish Government has put in place will go some way towards helping families. We want to take a whole-household approach. We also want to be guided by the cash-first principle, because we recognise that families require that if we are to give them agency and autonomy to make best use of their household budgets.

I hope that the £110 million that we have provided directly to support people in accessing food will go some way towards meeting the needs of the people whom Sarah Boyack has described.

However, there is also an opportunity for us to learn about what is working, what we could do more of and how we might link policies with others, including on housing, to ensure that as we move forward we are clear in our pursuit of eradication of food insecurity. We should aim to

link appropriately to the huge progress that has been made on homelessness during the pandemic and, more generally, to the policies that Kevin Stewart has been progressing in collaboration with our partners.

There is an opportunity for us to do more on this; there is an opportunity for us to maximise the impact of the resources and to knit with other policy areas much more effectively, whether that is around out-of-school clubs or holiday provision.

In a host of areas, we need to grab the opportunity to ensure that we work better for families who are at risk or are in need during these times, which are stressful for families when their children are at home.

I am happy to continue to engage with Sarah Boyack and with organisations on that. We will continue to look at the issue through our advisory board on social renewal, with a key theme being food insecurity, to make sure that we can move towards food security for everyone.

#### **“High Rise Inventory 2020—Summary Report”**

**3. Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what actions it is taking in response to the “High Rise Inventory 2020—Summary Report”. (S5O-04446)

**The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning (Kevin Stewart):** The report on the first high-rise inventory was published on 20 March this year. The purpose of the inventory is to provide the Scottish Government with an overview of the number of high-rise domestic buildings in Scotland, together with key aspects of the construction of, and fire safety features in, the buildings. The report has been shared with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, which has confirmed that the inventory will be a valuable resource that can be used to support operational responses to fires and fire prevention activities as well as to complement its quarterly operational assurance visits.

**Graham Simpson:** I am sure that the minister will be aware of the session that we had last week at the Local Government and Communities Committee, which looked at this issue. There were some calls for the inventory to be made public. Will the minister comment on that? There were also calls for the banning of combustible cladding in Scotland. Will he say something on that? Also, would he like to replicate the fund that the United Kingdom Government has set up for the removal of unsafe cladding? That £1 billion fund was set up by Robert Jenrick, who said:

“I will not accept any excuses from building owners who have yet to take action, and those responsible should register for the fund so that they can start the remediation process immediately.”

Will we have something similar here?

**Kevin Stewart:** As Mr Simpson is aware, I wrote a comprehensive letter to the LGC Committee last week on a number of related issues. I was due to appear in front of the committee at the beginning of April but, of course, that was cancelled because of the pandemic. I am more than happy to appear in front of the committee after the summer to talk about these issues.

There have been suggestions that the high-rise inventory be shared with surveyors, but there is no intention to do that as part of the conveyancing process, because there are risks in relation to the general data protection regulation and other data protection issues. There is also the possibility that the inventory might be used by ne'er-do-wells. However, sharing it is something that I am willing to consider.

Mr Simpson has heard me talk about taking the advice of the independent expert panel that we put in place in relation to the importance of BS 8414. I know that there is debate among the experts, including some of the people who appeared at the LGC Committee last week, about the value of BS 8414. It is recognised as a world-leading example of testing but, as I have said to the LGC Committee previously, we will continue to look at all aspects of the issue and take the necessary actions as we move forward.

Mr Simpson mentioned Mr Jenrick, who does not seem to have his troubles to seek at the moment. What would be useful in all of this is more co-operation from United Kingdom ministers. As Mr Simpson is aware, I have written to Mr Jenrick some five times on the issue, mostly about mortgage lending and insurance, which are reserved matters. It would be useful if we had more co-operation from the UK Government.

#### **Homelessness (Emergency Accommodation)**

**4. Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to ensure that emergency accommodation to tackle homelessness is provided throughout the duration of the Covid-19 outbreak. (S5O-04447)

**The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning (Kevin Stewart):** Since 23 March, we have provided over £1 million to third sector organisations to enable them to acquire emergency hotel accommodation for people experiencing homelessness—[Inaudible.]—such as people with no recourse to public funds. Intelligence from outreach services shows that there are no more than 30 people sleeping rough in the areas where rough sleeping is concentrated. Those individuals are known to services and they

are being encouraged daily to take up the offer of support.

We do not want anyone to return to unsuitable accommodation or rough sleeping as we emerge from the crisis. Supporting people out of emergency accommodation into settled homes will form the basis of our recovery plans. I have reconvened the homelessness and rough sleeping action group to guide us through the vital next stage, and I will work with partners to support people as we ease out of the lockdown period.

**Annie Wells:** As the minister said, the Scottish Government's rough sleeping action group is worried that, once the pandemic ends, homelessness could spike. What is the Government doing to ensure that that is not the case, especially when councils including Glasgow City Council have been accused by Shelter Scotland of turning homeless people away?

**Kevin Stewart:** As I mentioned in my initial response, we are working very well with partners across the board, including local government, to do our level best for people as we move out of the emergency period. We are looking to expand the housing first programme, and we have asked local authorities to look at their rapid rehousing transition plans. Beyond that, there continues to be positive support from—[Inaudible.]—and the third sector.

The most difficult thing for the Scottish Government in all of this is dealing with those folks who have no recourse to public funds. What we require is a change in UK Government policy in order to abolish those daft policies that cause great grief for many people. I would be grateful if Ms Wells and her colleagues would join me, the Scottish Government and the third sector in calling for a rethink on the issue of those who have no recourse to public funds. We have been allowed to help and support those people during the emergency. What we do not want is to go back to the default position of not being able to help them. Beyond that, the UK Government needs to provide resources to help those folks.

### Homelessness

**5. Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it will take to secure the progress made on homelessness during the Covid-19 outbreak. (S5O-04448)

**The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning (Kevin Stewart):** I will not go over the points that I made in my initial answer to Annie Wells. I say to Mr Rennie that we want to ensure that everyone has a warm, safe and affordable home that meets their needs. Our focus has not changed during the course of the pandemic, but our ambition has increased. The Government, the

public and third sector partners have come together well to accommodate hundreds of people who were living on the streets or in night shelters and hostels. The current emergency accommodation arrangements are, however, a temporary measure. The vital next stage of that work is to ensure that everyone is supported out of those arrangements and into settled homes.

**Willie Rennie:** That shows what can be done in an emergency, and I hope that we do not lose the progress that we have made in the past few months by getting people into secure homes. Of course, their homes need to be suitable for the long term.

The minister has talked about plans and discussions, but what I really want to know is this: what extra capacity has been put in place over the past few months to ensure that we do not go back to the way that we were, so that people have a home and so that homelessness is almost eradicated?

**Kevin Stewart:** That is a very good question from Mr Rennie. I can provide him with two concrete examples of some of the measures that are already in action. First, the Wheatley Group has allocated another 100 homes for housing first. That is extremely important, and we will be looking to other registered social landlords to do likewise.

Secondly, even at the very beginning of this pandemic period, more folks have been moving into housing first-supported homes. It is extremely important that we do that for some of the most vulnerable folks, because we have seen what can be done with the right levels of support: 92 per cent tenancy retention has been achieved thanks to that programme.

Beyond that, we have provided money to third sector partners including the Simon Community, Cyrenians and Crisis, in order to consider how we can better use the private rented sector to provide more homes for people.

As well as all the planning and discussions, of which there are a lot, there are already a number of practical examples of how we plan to move forward, getting folks out of emergency accommodation and into permanent, suitable accommodation that meets their needs.

### Third Sector Resilience Fund

**7. Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how many organisations in South Scotland have received support from the third sector resilience fund. (S5O-04450)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government (Aileen Campbell):** The third sector resilience fund—part of the £350 million of

emergency coronavirus funding that we have made available—has been a success. The funding has helped to protect about 12,500 jobs and more than 1,200 third sector organisations that had been made vulnerable as a result of the impact of Covid-19. As of 29 May, 30 organisations from the Scottish Borders and 35 from Dumfries and Galloway had received a total of £675,000. Further details of funding that has been made available to organisations through the third sector resilience fund and other funds are available through our community funding map on the Scottish Government website.

**Joan McAlpine:** I am very pleased to hear the number of organisations that have benefited from the fund. As the minister is aware, however, some charities fall through the net. Annan Athletic FC, which is a community-owned football club in my area, was refused both a business support grant, because of a historical rates anomaly, and the third sector resilience grant. The club employs 40 part-time staff, who are now furloughed but face being made redundant. It has had to run up debt, but it still does not know whether it can keep afloat. Can you advise whether the club can reapply for the third sector resilience fund, or is it too late?

**Aileen Campbell:** I understand that Annan Athletic's application was rejected but that, in line with what the fund was set up to do, the club was offered support via Just Enterprise, which helped to direct it to more appropriate funding streams—although it sounds as though things have moved on if the club has been talking about redundancy. I would be happy to engage with Joan McAlpine on the matter to see what further action can be taken to help.

I think that the club would be able to apply for third sector resilience funding again. Given the pressing nature of the employment situation, I will get my officials to engage with the club directly so that they can understand what is going on, offer any help, support and advice, and see whether there are other ways in which the club could be directed to further streams of support.

As a former sports minister and a football fan, I know how important our football clubs are in many of our communities and the extent to which so many of them have stepped up to support communities and people who face various degrees of vulnerability. I hope that we will be able to support Annan Athletic or at least direct the club to some other form of support that helps it out. We cannot promise anything, but I make a commitment to engage with Joan McAlpine and the club.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you very much. I thank the ministers—[*Temporary loss of sound.*]

14:55

*Meeting suspended.*

15:00

*On resuming—*

## Social Security and Older People

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The final item of business today is portfolio questions on social security and older people. I remind members that questions 2, 3 and 4 are grouped together. If a member wishes to ask a supplementary question, they should enter the letter "R". I will take any supplementaries to the grouped questions after all the questions in the group.

### Social Security Programme

1. **Tom Mason (North East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has to set out a revised social security programme. (S5O-04452)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** I updated Parliament in April, advising it that, due to the coronavirus outbreak, the social security programme would no longer be able to deliver to the previously announced timescales. My statement confirmed that the priorities for the programme are to support the day-to-day operations in Social Security Scotland, for example by delivering a suite of improvements to the agency's live running systems, and to deliver new benefits when possible, including the Scottish child payment, to allow applications to open before the end of the year.

The programme is undertaking a programme-wide replanning process, including an assessment of the capacity and readiness of key stakeholders such as the Department for Work and Pensions and health and social care professionals to assist with the delivery of disability benefits. It would not be appropriate to set out a revised social security programme until the replanning process has fully concluded. I will make announcements regarding individual benefits when it is possible to do so.

**Tom Mason:** I understand the difficulties in formalising a new timetable, but it is important that that is shared with Parliament as soon as is practicable.

I want to ask specifically about the Scottish child payment, as that is the Scottish Government's priority in social security. Can the cabinet secretary guarantee that it will be delivered before the end of the year? Is she confident that all necessary staff and training are in place to get early delivery right?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** I thank Mr Mason for his interest in the Scottish child payment. He is right to point out that its delivery is the priority for the Government. At the moment, we do not have the required number of staff in the agency to deliver the Scottish child payment, which is why we have had to delay its introduction. There is a recruitment freeze at present, but we will begin to end it when it is possible to do so, following Scottish Government guidance.

I assure Mr Mason and other members that we are determined to move forward with delivery of the Scottish child payment as soon as possible. We absolutely recognise the need to get it delivered as quickly as possible, given the circumstances that many people are in.

### **Older People (Covid-19 Support and Guidance)**

**2. Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what support and guidance it is providing to older people during the Covid-19 outbreak. (S5O-04453)

**The Minister for Older People and Equalities (Christina McKelvie):** We have provided about £1.7 million to organisations that are directly supporting the needs of older people during the pandemic. That includes funding for helplines, for food distribution and to keep people connected. We have also set up a national helpline that is linked to local authorities and we have distributed 2.6 million leaflets that signpost people to sources of relevant advice. There are a number of phone numbers on the leaflet.

Both I and the Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People have met Age Scotland and the older people's strategic action forum to ensure that we hear the voices and concerns of older people and act to ensure that their lived experience and understanding are addressed in the policies and actions that we take.

**Dean Lockhart:** As the minister will understand, the latest Scottish Government guidance can be confusing for some older people to follow, and for obvious reasons the guidance changes quite frequently. Many grandparents and other older people will be planning to help with childcare as parents return to work. Can the minister issue specific guidelines on what older people can and cannot do in those circumstances?

**Christina McKelvie:** I thank Dean Lockhart for that multifaceted question. Some of the language can be confusing and hard to understand. We took early action to consult, and stakeholders have been involved in the production of many pieces of information that have gone out, whether in social media, news releases or leaflets, to ensure that the language is straightforward. One thing that we

learned was that, when people were asked to go to an online hub, they thought that that was a place rather than something online. Very early on, we became aware that that is a real issue.

On the point about grandparents, Dean Lockhart will have seen updated guidance and information from the First Minister yesterday, and there has been updated information on care homes and other aspects today. I suspect that we will see further updates as we go along.

We are taking all those steps carefully and cautiously. I know that grandparents are desperate to see their grandchildren, and we have provided additional information on that. The older age group is the most at-risk group, so part of our concern is about how we tailor information for at-risk and shielding groups so that people can find out where they have some agency and independence and whether they can see their grandchildren. Right now, they can do that with all the social distancing and practical measures in place to maintain safety, but I suspect that grandparents are looking forward to again taking on the childminding and caring duties that they used to have.

Updated guidance on that will be coming as soon as possible. As soon as I can share that with Parliament, I will do so.

### **Older People (Support)**

**Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD):** Like other members, I have been contacted by grandparents who are anxious to see their grandchildren on the mainland but are unable to do so because of coronavirus restrictions. In the Government's response to the pandemic, has specific consideration been given to the rights of older people in the islands?

**The Minister for Older People and Equalities (Christina McKelvie):** I think that that might be Beatrice Wishart's supplementary, rather than her main question.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** It is.

**Christina McKelvie:** It is absolutely fair enough to look at some of the issues that we have around older people and how we keep them connected. We have taken a lot of measures to do that, including funding befriending organisations, supporting Age Scotland's national helpline, combating loneliness—which is a big issue that I have been involved in with all the stakeholders—and providing resources to organisations working at the community level.

We have been taking a lot of information and advice from people in rural areas and on the islands. We want to make sure that we can tailor some of our information to those people. We have run pilots for island communities across Argyll and

Bute, and we have provided a number of testing kits and other information throughout Shetland, Orkney and the Western Isles to ensure that people on those islands are completely connected. We are ensuring that we are collecting the right information and understanding people in those communities. Working closely with local authorities and stakeholders has given us a clear understanding of islanders' needs.

If Beatrice Wishart wants to raise particular issues with me, I am keen to hear them. That would inform the next steps that we take and the policy that we develop. I hope that she will get in touch with me on that.

### Older People (Support)

**4. Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government how it is supporting older people during the Covid-19 outbreak. (S5O-04455)

**The Minister for Older People and Equalities (Christina McKelvie):** In addition to my previous remarks and the points that I have just made, support for older people to keep them safe, connected and cared for continues. Fairness and human rights remain central to our approach to all those aspects.

Investment in the food fund now totals £85 million to ensure support for people whose food access has been affected, many of whom are older people. That is in addition to around £1.7 million of funding for older people's organisations, around £900,000 of which went directly to members of the older people's strategic action forum for projects around advice, support, intergenerational activity, befriending, friendship and food.

In addition, we have delivered the clear your head mental health campaign to raise awareness and signpost people to services to combat social isolation and loneliness, which we know are among the main harms for older people in the pandemic.

**Neil Findlay:** Christina McKelvie mentioned the safety and human rights of older people. As the minister for older people, was she consulted on the policy of discharging 1,300 older people from hospitals to care homes, untested? If she was consulted, what did she say?

**Christina McKelvie:** Neil Findlay will know that those health decisions are taken by my colleagues in health. There are many aspects across Government on which I intervene, support and advise. That includes my equalities and human rights officials, who work very closely with health officials to ensure that all the work that we do has human rights and equalities at its heart.

One of the main aspects of that work is mainstreaming equalities and human rights, and one of the key pieces of work alongside that is the equality and human rights impact assessments, which have been done and have been published thus far. I direct Neil Findlay to them to see the work in which we have intervened and advised on those policies.

### Advisory Board on Social Renewal (Remit)

**5. John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what the extent will be of the remit of the advisory board on social renewal. (S5O-04456)

#### The Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People (Shirley-Anne Somerville):

The advisory board on social renewal has been tasked with developing new policy proposals at pace to help to renew Scotland, putting equality, social justice and human rights at the heart of our recovery. It will learn from, and build on, the positive policy and practice shifts seen during our response to Covid-19. The board will scrutinise the work of a series of policy circles, each of which will be tasked to work on recommendations and solutions on key issues—for example, food and housing. At the heart of the process will be meaningful and effective engagement with people with lived experience.

**John Mason:** Will the board specifically consider the black, Asian and minority ethnic community and inequality, as there is a feeling that Covid-19 has exacerbated what were already inequalities around race?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** Mr Mason raises a very important point. We know that Covid-19 impacts unequally on different communities, and that is a central recognition that will be part of the board's work. We require co-ordinated cross-Government action on that and many other issues.

One of the principles of the board is to work with equality and human rights embedded throughout, and an integral part of that will, of course, be the work that we do with black and minority ethnic communities to seek to find ways to ensure that we see genuine change following the pandemic.

There is also specific work going on to understand and address the impact of Covid-19 on minority ethnic communities. That includes work on improving the data on Covid and ethnicity, providing advice on risk assessment for minority ethnic people in the workplace, and ensuring that tailored public health messaging is reached in our diverse communities. That work is directed by the Covid and ethnicity expert reference group and is informed by direct contact with minority ethnic communities and the organisations that support them.

### Devolved Social Security Benefits

6. **Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how devolved social security benefits are providing assistance during the Covid-19 pandemic. (S5O-04457)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** Social Security Scotland has rapidly changed its working practices to enable agency staff to continue to deliver the carers allowance supplement, the young carer grant, the best start grant payments, the best start foods payments and the funeral support payment for people on low-income benefits.

Payments of the coronavirus carers allowance supplement will begin later this week to carers who are in receipt of the carers allowance. That investment of £19.2 million will provide an extra £230 to around 83,000 of Scotland's lowest-income carers. At the same time, the social security programme has prioritised its remaining resources to support the delivery of the Scottish child payment as soon as we can. That will put money directly into the pockets of families who may struggle with the impact of Covid-19 for months to come.

**Bob Doris:** A recent report from the Institute for Public Policy and Research found that 1.1 million more people are facing poverty at the end of 2020 as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, but that increases in child poverty could be entirely prevented by removing the two-child limit and the benefit cap. Does the cabinet secretary agree that the Chancellor of the Exchequer must include those measures as part of his economic stimulus package this summer to avoid more families and children being plunged into poverty?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** I welcome the IPPR's report and agree with Bob Doris that urgent action is required to prevent the flaws in the UK Government's benefit system from deepening the social and economic harm that is being felt as a result of Covid-19. I urge the chancellor to include those measures as part of the economic recovery plans.

I have written to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on multiple occasions since the start of the Covid-19 outbreak, calling on her to make universal credit more responsive to people's needs. That has included a call to make fundamental changes to the benefits system by removing the two-child limit and the benefit cap. As Bob Doris quite rightly points out, changes such as those would ensure that the increases that are forecasted for child poverty could be entirely prevented.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 7 has been withdrawn. I will move on to question 8.

### Covid-19 (Impact on Women)

8. **Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to ensure that the Covid-19 outbreak does not disproportionately impact women. (S5O-04459)

**The Minister for Older People and Equalities (Christina McKelvie):** The pandemic is affecting all of us, but some groups, including women, are harder hit by the labour market disruption, as they are more likely to be working in "shut down" sectors such as catering or retail.

Our ambition for Scotland's recovery is set out in the core principles of our "Coronavirus (COVID-19): framework for decision making". It recognises that the "harms caused" by the pandemic

"do not impact everyone equally"

and that we must work to

"advance equality and protect human rights"

in our response. We will ensure that the work that we do on recovery and renewal embeds a gendered analysis into our decisions and actions so that we can mitigate those impacts on women.

**Clare Adamson:** Given that the majority of caring and childcare responsibilities remain with women, what can the Scottish Government do to persuade employers to support women, who may suffer disproportionate disruption to their employment because of caring and childcare commitments, as we ease lockdown restrictions and move towards a return to school?

**Christina McKelvie:** That is an incredibly important question. As the recovery process progresses, equalities, fair work and wellbeing will remain at the heart of our approach. All our focus remains on controlling and suppressing the virus during phase 2 and into phase 3. There is a role for both the Scottish Government and employers in mitigating the impact of control measures on women.

The Scottish Government, along with the Hunter Foundation, is providing funding £175,000 to Flexibility Works to support and promote the development of flexible and family-friendly workplaces. That includes offering vital advice and support on flexible working to businesses and organisations to help them to respond to the Covid-19 crisis.

During phase 2, the Scottish Government and local authorities continue to provide targeted childcare support to the children of key workers and children who the local authority recognises are more vulnerable or at risk. The option to form

an extended household as part of phase 2 of our recovery will no doubt have been welcomed by many and will offer more support for childcare and the wellbeing of single-parent families.

We have also announced an indicative date of 15 July for all other childcare settings to reopen, including early learning childcare and out-of-school care—that will be welcomed by parents and grandparents the nation over.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes portfolio questions on social security and older people. I close the meeting.

*Meeting closed at 15:19.*



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