



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament (Hybrid)

**Tuesday 27 October 2020**

**Session 5**



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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**Tuesday 27 October 2020**

**CONTENTS**

	<b>Col.</b>
<b>TIME FOR REFLECTION</b> .....	1
<b>BUSINESS MOTION</b> .....	3
<i>Motion moved—[Graeme Dey]—and agreed to.</i>	
Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab) .....	4
The Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans (Graeme Dey) .....	5
<b>TOPICAL QUESTION TIME</b> .....	11
Redmill Care Home .....	11
Covid-19 Restrictions (Impact on Health and Economy) .....	15
Covid-19 Restrictions (Hospitality Businesses) .....	19
Personal Protective Equipment (VAT) .....	24
Test and Protect Data .....	25
<b>INWARD INVESTMENT PLAN</b> .....	28
<i>Statement—[Ivan McKee].</i>	
The Minister for Trade, Investment and Innovation (Ivan McKee) .....	28
<b>COVID-19: SCOTLAND'S STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK</b> .....	41
<i>Motion moved—[Nicola Sturgeon].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Ruth Davidson].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Richard Leonard].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Alison Johnstone].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Willie Rennie].</i>	
The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon) .....	41
Ruth Davidson (Edinburgh Central) (Con) .....	49
Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab) .....	55
Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green) .....	59
Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD) .....	62
Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP) .....	65
Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con) .....	67
Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP) .....	69
Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab) .....	71
Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con) .....	74
Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP) .....	76
Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP) .....	78
Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab) .....	81
Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP) .....	85
Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con) .....	87
Alex Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP) .....	89
Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab) .....	91
Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP) .....	94
Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con) .....	96
Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD) .....	99
Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green) .....	100
Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab) .....	102
Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con) .....	106
The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman) .....	109
<b>DECISION TIME</b> .....	115
<b>STUDENT PARAMEDICS (BURSARY SUPPORT)</b> .....	121
<i>Motion debated—[Liam McArthur].</i>	
Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD) .....	121
Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP) .....	124
Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con) .....	126

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab) .....	127
Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green).....	129
The Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing (Joe FitzPatrick).....	130

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# Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 27 October 2020

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

## Time for Reflection

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** Welcome back, colleagues. Before we begin, I remind members of the social distancing rules that are in place throughout the Holyrood campus—in particular, our new rules on colleagues wearing masks when moving around. I also remind members that, when they are entering and leaving the chamber, they should try to keep the noise down, as all the doors at the back are now open.

Our first item of business today is time for reflection, and our time for reflection leader is Canon Hugh White of St John the Baptist Roman Catholic church in Fauldhouse.

**Canon Hugh White (St John the Baptist RC Church, Fauldhouse):** Members of this distinguished chamber, although the pulpit and the political platform are not interchangeable, each provides a unique opportunity to serve the best interests of all the people who live here, in Scotland. To stand in either is a privilege, but it is also a responsibility that has been entrusted to us in good faith and is deserving of equal good faith from us—although faith is usually associated more with the pulpit, and some might consider it to have no place in the political arena.

During debates, the cry “Hear, hear” might be music to your ears, it being a sign of approval. There is no corresponding sign from a normal Scottish congregation. However, the first time that I preached in an Afro-American church, in New Orleans, I was initially taken aback—but was increasingly encouraged—by spontaneous outbursts of “Amen, father”. I doubt that that will catch on over here, but it set me thinking about the word “amen”.

Once, on a flight home from Rome, I found myself seated next to the then British Minister to the Holy See. Throughout the journey, he read a dictionary. I first thought, “How odd”, but, on reflection, that became, “How appropriate for a diplomat.” For him, good wordcraft was important—as it should be for us, because we have to choose our words wisely at times.

Roots can help with that. “Amen” is a word that is in common religious usage, but its root reaches beyond religious frontiers and suggests that every human being needs an amen in life. It is a Hebrew word whose root—“amin”—means to stand on firm

ground and to take a stance in life from which we can speak with authority and operate with confidence.

In 1980, Bishop Agnellus Andrew, a Glasgow-born Franciscan priest, was appointed vice-president of the Pontifical Commission for Social Communications. He was wont to say:

“Good communication is to speak, is to be heard, is to be understood, is to be accepted”

—that is, to be accepted as a person whose personal amen is evidently built on principle, conviction and experience, and whose word is good.

So the question is, what is my amen? As a priest, I am expected to build my life, my word and my work on the word of God himself: Jesus Christ. That word is capable not only of informing people but of transforming their lives for the better. It is through him that I answer amen to the praise of God.

Amen.

**The Presiding Officer:** Amen—and thank you, Canon White.

## Business Motion

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-23149, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, which sets out revisions to this week's business.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees to the following revisions to the programme of business on—

(a) Tuesday 27 October 2020

delete

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Miners' Strike Review

*followed by* Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee Debate: Energy Inquiry

and insert

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Shaping Scotland's Economy: Scotland's Inward Investment Plan

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: COVID-19: Scotland's Strategic Framework

delete

5.00 pm Decision Time

and insert

7.00 pm Decision Time

(b) Wednesday 28 October 2020

after

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:  
Constitution, Europe and External Affairs;  
Economy, Fair Work and Culture

insert

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Miners' Strike Review

delete

*followed by* Scottish Government Business

and insert

*followed by* Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee Debate: Energy Inquiry

delete

5.00 pm Decision Time

and insert

5.20 pm Decision Time

(c) Thursday 29 October 2020

after

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:  
Education and Skills

insert

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: An Update on the Impact of EU Exit on Scotland's Further

and Higher Education Sectors

delete

5.00 pm Decision Time

and insert

5.05 pm Decision Time—[*Graeme Dey.*]

**The Presiding Officer:** Elaine Smith wishes to speak against the motion.

14:04

**Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I rise to oppose the business motion on behalf of Scottish Labour. I do so with regret, because this situation could have been avoided if the Government had consented to the Covid restrictions scrutiny that was already agreed to by the Parliamentary Bureau and that had been notified to members. Instead, public scrutiny by the Parliament has been reduced and curtailed, with announcements made to the press and not to Parliament. That is completely unacceptable in such a serious situation, in which lives are being lost to the virus, draconian restrictions imposed and livelihoods adversely affected.

The bureau had agreed to a statement by the First Minister today with questions from members. That was at my request, as I felt that it was vital for as many members as possible to be able to question the First Minister directly following the recess, to scrutinise the effectiveness of the strict 16-day measures that Scotland has been subjected to. The bureau then scheduled for tomorrow a debate to discuss the Government's approach to Covid-19 going forward and then a vote on the matter, to allow MSPs to give their views on the new proposals. That would have given members the time to digest the complicated new plans that the First Minister is now instigating in her latest attempt to slow the spread of the virus and to consider replies to the myriad questions that would have been posed by MSPs on behalf of the people we are elected to serve.

I also requested consideration of a recall of Parliament last week, as I was concerned that a major announcement was going to be made at the First Minister's daily press conference. As Labour's business manager, I have consistently argued that the First Minister must make major announcements to Parliament and not at press conferences, in the interests of democracy and scrutiny. However, others on the bureau at that point did not favour a recall, and I understood that that was because no major announcement was expected and that there was due to be a ministerial statement today, to allow for parliamentary scrutiny. However, of course, a major announcement was made last Thursday that is affecting hundreds of jobs, particularly in the hospitality sector, that is keeping businesses

closed for at least another week and that is retaining restrictions that affect people's rights and freedoms.

No consultation was undertaken before the 16-day lockdown. However, we were all assured by the First Minister that this was a

"short and sharp action to arrest a worrying increase in infection",—[*Official Report*, 7 October 2020; c 28.]

and she promised to "keep the Parliament updated". Obviously, it is not short and sharp, because it does not seem to have worked, and the Parliament has not been updated. We are being sidelined with the cancellation of today's statement and question session, and the people we represent are being left with no answers to their many questions. It is even more galling because the First Minister has been keen to say that she is open to scrutiny—so why not by members of the Parliament today, with questions?

We are being asked to support a motion today to simply note the Scottish Government's decisions—not to agree or endorse, as has been trailed in the media, but just to note, which means that we are merely observers. What is the point in voting on the motion when we are being asked simply to note the Government's decisions? Why does the Government avoid having its actions and plans subjected to questions, instead wanting a debate on a motion that asks us to take note—a debate in which, because of the d'Hondt system, the majority of slots are allocated to the Scottish National Party? Why are other parties going along with that?

We are now at a point where Parliament must have a much greater role in scrutinising the Government on Covid, particularly when it is dictating its plans rather than fully involving all parliamentarians in those decisions. The people we represent are being harmed in many ways—not only by Covid-19 but by the actions taken in the response to tackle it, in terms of their mental and physical health, their financial situation and the loss of freedoms, human rights and civil liberties.

Given the gravity of the situation, we, as parliamentarians, need to be able to thoroughly scrutinise the First Minister and her Government to ensure that their actions are proportionate to the level of threat that society faces, and we need disclosure of the full facts to be able to do that. The Parliament is not being given that opportunity today, nor tomorrow; therefore, with regret, I move against the business motion.

14:09

**The Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans (Graeme Dey):** When the bureau, by majority, approved this week's changed business

plan, it sanctioned the staging of a three-hour-long debate on Covid restriction changes and an extended topical questions session. The primary thinking behind that was to accommodate as many Covid-related questions as is reasonably possible. Members will note that four of the five topical questions that the Presiding Officer has selected for today are Covid themed.

Unfortunately, the opposing of business had the potential to eat significantly into that additional time and thereby reduce the opportunity for those members who were selected to ask their questions, and for others, to raise topical questions. Alive to that, the bureau returned to the matter a couple of hours ago and agreed a further 30-minute extension to decision time, to preserve the maximum opportunity for questions.

On behalf of the bureau, and in keeping with our desire to afford the optimum chance for colleagues to participate in the extended topical questions session, I will conclude there, save to ask members to approve the business motion and, furthermore, to allow Parliament to get on with debating in detail "COVID-19: Scotland's Strategic Framework".

**Elaine Smith:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer, will you clarify whether, under the standing orders, it is the bureau that agrees the number of topical questions and what they are or whether it is you, as the Presiding Officer, who does so?

**The Presiding Officer:** The topical questions are my choice, but the allocation of time is for the bureau to recommend, and it is a decision for the whole Parliament—the matter is put to members and they decide on the allocation of time.

The question is, that motion S5M-23149 be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division. I will summon members to the chamber and let members who are participating remotely know that they can dial in. I therefore suspend proceedings for a few moments until we can get members on to the remote access voting system.

14:11

*Meeting suspended.*

14:21

*On resuming—*

**The Presiding Officer:** We resume business with members online and in the chamber. We move to the vote on motion S5M-23149, in the name of Graeme Dey, on a revised business

motion. Members may cast their votes now. This will be a one-minute 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)  
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)  
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)  
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

### Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 83, Against 22, Abstentions 0.

### *Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees to the following revisions to the programme of business on—

(a) Tuesday 27 October 2020

delete

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Miners' Strike Review

*followed by* Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee Debate: Energy Inquiry

and insert

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5.00 pm Decision Time



and insert

7.00 pm Decision Time

(b) Wednesday 28 October 2020

after

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:  
Constitution, Europe and External  
Affairs;  
Economy, Fair Work and Culture

insert

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Miners' Strike  
Review

delete

*followed by* Scottish Government Business

and insert

*followed by* Economy, Energy and Fair Work  
Committee Debate: Energy Inquiry

delete

5.00 pm Decision Time

and insert

5.20 pm Decision Time

(c) Thursday 29 October 2020

after

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:  
Education and Skills

insert

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: An Update on the  
Impact of EU Exit on Scotland's Further  
and Higher Education Sectors

delete

5.00 pm Decision Time

and insert

5.05 pm Decision Time

**The Presiding Officer:** Before we move on to the next item of business, I would like to make a few remarks. Members will be aware that, seven months on from the imposition of restrictions, I have spoken in recent weeks about the need for Parliament to reassert its vital role in scrutinising the very difficult decisions that ministers are taking, often necessarily, with some urgency.

Colleagues on the Parliamentary Bureau are continuing to discuss how we can create more and earlier opportunities for accountability and participation in the policy choices that affect the daily lives of the people we represent, and for consideration of the impact that those decisions are having on the economy and the best ways to keep people safe. That Parliament-led approach is shaped by all members and recognises the significant role of committees. I hope that colleagues will take the time to contribute any thoughts, comments or practical ideas about how

we can improve Covid-related scrutiny before the bureau's meeting next week.

Sitting alongside that work, I will continue to explore with the Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans how we might create more consistency and transparency for members—and, indeed, the public—in relation to how announcements are being made.

Finally, I emphasise to all members that I am determined to ensure that Parliament's position is respected and that you have the opportunities and time that you need to raise your concerns on behalf of your constituents.

## Topical Question Time

14:25

### Redmill Care Home

**1. Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the reports of at least 14 deaths at Redmill Care Home. Tragically, earlier today I was advised that that number is now 15. (S5T-02459)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman):** My first response is that the thoughts of the Government are with the residents, staff and families who have loved ones at Redmill, and our condolences go to those families who sadly have lost relatives. Dedicated daily support is being provided to the home by NHS Lothian and the health and social care partnership. That includes the provision of support in the form of staffing and infection prevention and control measures.

The Care Inspectorate is closely monitoring the home and has undertaken an unannounced inspection of it to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the residents, with a further return inspection taking place yesterday and today.

**Neil Findlay:** The situation at Redmill is heartbreaking. My thoughts and prayers are with all the families of the bereaved, and the care home staff, many of whom have been affected by the virus themselves and who have been going way beyond the call of duty in trying to help residents at this awful time. No one—and I mean no one—has contacted me to complain about their commitment to residents during this period, but many families and staff have raised concerns about confusion and delays over testing. Why did it take six days for whole-home testing at Redmill? Did residents become infected and subsequently die during that delay? What type of support is being provided by the national health service? Is it right that agency staff who potentially work across different homes are working at a home with such a significant outbreak? What action is being taken to keep Covid-positive patients and Covid-negative patients safe during this time? Will the cabinet secretary comment on those important issues?

**Jeane Freeman:** I am grateful to Mr Findlay for raising those questions. When he previously asked about the issue at topical question time, he raised a series of points, which I replied to on 9 October. I understand that he has also received correspondence from NHS Lothian and HC-One.

That being said, a number of issues need to be addressed. Following its second inspection, which, as I said, has been happening yesterday and today, the Care Inspectorate will provide me with

its view on what level of improvement is required and on whether improvements that it highlighted following its unannounced inspection have been followed through, and, if they have not, what it believes should be done about it, including what action it might want to take and what action the Government might take.

My understanding is that, at the moment, the health protection team is in the home twice a week to test residents and staff. It seems to me that, in this, as in other areas, communication with residents and their families—and, indeed, with staff—could be considerably improved. I am very happy to take that on and see whether we can ensure that there is greater transparency in the information and the updates available to those individuals in particular, but also, of course, to the local members—here and elsewhere—who represent people in care homes.

**Neil Findlay:** Families have indeed raised the lack of communication with them and the lack of answers to very basic questions such as, “Has my mum or dad been tested? When were they tested? What was the result? Why am I finding out more information from the media than from HC-One? Why has my loved one not been admitted to hospital for treatment when they are seriously ill?”

The Government says that it is being straight and transparent with people, but just because it says that, that does not mean that it is true. Every bit of information that people are getting is having to be dragged out of HC-One, the NHS or, indeed, the Care Inspectorate. The families are asking basic questions, and they and staff deserve so much better.

Will the cabinet secretary ensure that families get straight answers to their straight questions? Can she advise why relatives believe that elderly people are still being denied hospital treatment?

**Jeane Freeman:** I cannot answer the latter part of Mr Findlay's question at this point because I have no information about what the specific instances might be or what clinical decisions have been made around any particular individual. Members would not expect me to have that information because I am not a clinician and I do not make those decisions. However, if any family wants to write to me about that, I would, of course, take that seriously and look to see what further information I could provide to them.

On the first part of Mr Findlay's question, my track record on ensuring that our health boards in particular are clear with families, relatives, patients and residents in care homes is there for members to make a judgment on. I am very keen that everyone gets the information that they need timeously and in language that is easily understood, that their questions are answered,

and that, if they have repeat questions, they are answered. That is central to the health and social care system that we should have.

As far as HC-One and what it does as a private sector provider is concerned, I can require and request it to answer those questions, and I can take up that matter with the Care Inspectorate. The bit that I can ensure happens is the bit that happens with NHS Lothian and, through it, the health and social care partnership. I will take that on board, and I hope that, perhaps with Mr Findlay's assistance and that of any other member with a constituency interest in the area, I can be clear in my mind about exactly what all the questions are that families want to know the answers to right now, as well as putting in place a system that allows them to be regularly and properly updated.

**Neil Findlay:** HC-One has provided more information to me than the NHS, the health and social care partnership and the Care Inspectorate combined. The key point is that families should not have to write to the cabinet secretary to get those answers—indeed, they should not even have to write to me to get them. Those answers should be given as of right, and those families deserve transparency.

**Jeane Freeman:** I agree with that: families should not have to write to me. However, if HC-One is giving Mr Findlay more information than NHS Lothian or the health and social care partnership is, it should be giving that information to families without waiting to be asked and without having to use Mr Findlay as the conduit to do that. HC-One, as the provider, has a clear responsibility to provide that information to the residents of the care home that it receives money to run and to ensure that it is properly provided for, and to their families. I will take up the question with NHS Lothian and, through it, the health and social care partnership, and I am confident that Mr Findlay will join me in pressing HC-One to be as transparent with residents and families as it is with him.

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** I think that we all understand that regularity in staff testing is vital in preventing the spread of Covid-19 in care homes. The tragic case that the member has mentioned and evidence from the rest of Scotland highlight that the system that is in place is perhaps not working quite as well as it could be. Will the cabinet secretary commit today to publishing the data on how many care home staff are tested and the frequency of those tests?

**Jeane Freeman:** The data on the number of care home staff who are tested on a weekly basis is published every week. I think that Mr Whittle knows that staff testing in care homes is undertaken using the satellite channel, which is part of the United Kingdom Government's

Lighthouse programme. Despite a number of efforts, the satellite channel has had the least consistent test turnaround times. In order to improve that and to free up capacity in the Lighthouse programme, we are, as Mr Whittle knows, transitioning the testing in care homes to the NHS labs, which will be completed. Our three new regional NHS lab hubs will come on stream from early November, build to full capacity by the middle to the end of December, and provide an additional 22,000 tests per day. That will allow us to have greater control over the speed of the test turnaround times. As Mr Whittle knows, the NHS has an average turnaround time of 27 hours for the tests that it processes.

**Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green):** I, too, express my condolences to all those who have lost loved ones as a result of the outbreak.

After the new outbreaks in care homes, questions will be raised about how exactly the virus was able to enter and spread through the care homes involved. Will the exact reasons for that outbreak be revealed in due course, including what role, if any, the availability of personal protective equipment might have played?

**Jeane Freeman:** I thank the member for his question. As he knows, we commissioned Public Health Scotland to undertake work on the discharge and admission of patients into care homes, looking at a range of data. That involved the body working with the University of Edinburgh and the University of Glasgow and that report will be published tomorrow. I have offered to write to the Health and Sport Committee with a link to that report and those organisations have offered to give a briefing to the committee on the work that they undertook, the basis on which they gathered the data and the basis on which they reached their conclusions and made their recommendations.

However, in addition, I have commissioned a root cause analysis on the recent occurrences of outbreaks in our care homes, to understand why those outbreaks are happening in a system in which we have confidence in the distribution and supply of PPE when providers are asking us for it—the Care Inspectorate is inspecting on that basis and on the basis of infection prevention and control—and in which we have testing and the primary care wraparound. I, too, need to understand the basis on which, or the route by which, the Covid-19 infection is entering care homes and what more we need to do. I hope to be able to update the member on that root cause analysis and the steps that we are taking in the near future in the chamber when I publish the winter preparedness plan for adult social care.

## **Covid-19 Restrictions (Impact on Health and Economy)**

**2. Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what analysis it has carried out of the impact of the most recent restrictions on both health and the economy. (S5T-02478)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney):** Decisions on protective measures are taken on the basis of public health advice from the national incident management team that is chaired by Public Health Scotland, and then on the basis of a broader four-harms assessment by senior clinical and policy advisors, looking at the likely impacts of protective measures, not only in reducing transmission of the virus, but on wider health, society and the economy. The impact is closely monitored and is taken into account in considering whether to maintain, ease or strengthen measures that are currently in place.

**Sarah Boyack:** Will the Deputy First Minister publish that assessment so that we can inform our constituents on the background to the Government's current work? The strategy is now to move from four phases to five tiers, so what baseline has the Scottish Government adopted that will inform policy decisions on the five categories of measures that were published last week, and which will lead to decisions on local restrictions from next Monday that the First Minister will, I understand, announce on Thursday?

**John Swinney:** The Government publishes a significant amount of the evidence base that underpins the decisions that we take. An evidence paper was produced as part of the information that was put into the public domain before the October recess. In our dialogue with local authority partners, we have also shared a vast amount of data and information on prevalence of the virus and the circumstances in which it is spreading. That takes into account many of the issues that Sarah Boyack has raised. Of course, if there is other specific information that she believes it would be helpful for the Government to publish, I would be very happy to consider that.

On the baseline for the levels framework that the First Minister set out on Friday, which will be the subject of debate later today, level 0 is, essentially, the position that we reached when we entered phase 3 of the route map out of lockdown. That enabled a significant proportion of our economy and society to reopen; 96 per cent of our businesses reopened, our schools reopened, our colleges and universities returned and many aspects of people's lives went back to a semblance of normality. That is the baseline for the levels framework. Obviously, the levels indicate the degree of more serious challenge in

different localities. As I have said, that issue will be discussed by Parliament this afternoon.

**Sarah Boyack:** Will the cabinet secretary accept that, even though we got a raft of information this morning to inform the discussions that we MSPs will have this afternoon, we do not have information on the first issue that I asked him about, which is the impact of the two weeks of restrictions that we have just experienced? We need to be able to demonstrate to our constituents what works and what does not work as well as is needed, in order to inform their habits and their compliance with the new restrictions that we will all be issued with, and which will start next week.

The cabinet secretary mentioned the four-harms analysis and the five indicators that inform the levels that he is adopting. Can we have clarity on how those relate to each other and how they will inform the decisions that the Government will take this week that will put us on the new levels? Can he demonstrate what has happened thus far that will inform those decisions? Reading the paperwork does not give the clarity that our constituents are asking for, regardless of the position that they are coming from.

**John Swinney:** One of the challenges of addressing that question is the fact that the gestation period of the virus requires that sufficient time pass before we can see the effect of the restrictive measures that we have put in place. For example, the two weeks of restrictions that were applied shortly before recess—which we have said we will extend for a further week, until 2 November, when the new levels framework comes into place—is essentially one gestation cycle for the virus. As a consequence, we will see the progress of the measures that have been taken to tackle the virus.

I say to Sarah Boyack that the best means by which we can identify what works is our seeing its impact on the prevalence of the virus. The extensive data that has been published by Public Health Scotland on prevalence of the virus, on a day-by-day and neighbourhood-by-neighbourhood basis, gives some of the strongest possible fine detail on the effectiveness of measures. For example, the city of Aberdeen has gone from being in a very acute situation of infectiousness some weeks ago to a position in which there is much lower prevalence of the virus, because of the measures that were put in place. Other parts of the country have moved in the opposite direction.

There is data available. That is the material that I am discussing with local authority leaders, as we prepare for application of the levels framework. I have more calls to make on that, to which I have to return very shortly. That data will enable us to

have proper and full dialogue with local authority partners about how we make decisions.

**The Presiding Officer:** There are a number of supplementaries.

**Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con):** Aberdeen and Edinburgh have shown the biggest falls in jobs vacancies anywhere in the United Kingdom during the crisis. How can local economies be expected to recover if the Scottish National Party's business support measures are failing to such an extent?

**John Swinney:** I simply do not follow the logic of Mr Golden's incoherent question. The Government is putting in place support that is commensurate with the resources that are available to it. We are assisting individual local economies and businesses to deal with the current circumstances. The issue that Mr Golden has raised—the performance of the Aberdeen and Edinburgh economies—is a product of a global pandemic that all Governments are trying to tackle by putting in place business supports that are commensurate with what is available to them.

If Mr Golden was to put any muscle that he has into encouraging the United Kingdom Government to deal with Scotland in a level and fair way, compared with how it is dealing with England, and to provide the Cabinet Secretary for Finance with the degree of flexibility that has been given in England, that would certainly help to address the core of Mr Golden's question.

**Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP):** Given what the cabinet secretary has just been saying, what representations will he make to the UK Government about the financial assistance that is needed now to help Scottish businesses and employees to get through this economic crisis?

**John Swinney:** The Government is in regular contact with the UK Government on that question. Indeed, the finance secretary was involved in a finance ministers quadrilateral meeting just last week. She continues to make vigorous representations to the UK Government, and did so in a further letter on 20 October.

All this matters, because the support that has been available to businesses in Scotland has been a combination of the financial support that has been offered by the Scottish Government and the coronavirus job retention scheme that the United Kingdom Government made available. Dr Allan will be familiar with the fact that the furlough scheme has been severely curtailed as a consequence of decisions that have been taken by the UK Government. We are urging it to revisit those decisions to enable us to put stronger financial support in place for businesses and to

complement the assistance that is available from the Scottish Government.

**James Kelly (Glasgow) (Lab):** Yesterday's reports that North and South Lanarkshire are being considered for tier 4 restrictions have been met with anxiety across the region. A move to tier 4 would undoubtedly result in job losses and businesses closing. What financial support will be put in place to avoid a catastrophic impact on local communities? When will the decision be taken about Lanarkshire? What interaction will there be with local council leaders, business leaders, and parliamentarians?

**John Swinney:** On the situation in North and South Lanarkshire, Mr Kelly is correct that the correspondence that the Government sent to the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities set out the detail that came from the national incident management team, to which I referred in my answer to Sarah Boyack. It suggests, based on current prevalence of the virus, that there are concerns that could see North and South Lanarkshire being allocated to tier 4 within the framework. I stress to Mr Kelly that the Government wishes to avoid that, if it is at all possible, but we have to be cognisant of the evidence and data that are put in front of us by our public health experts.

On the question about our interaction with local authority leaders, just before I came into the chamber I spoke to the leader and the chief executive of North Lanarkshire Council. When I leave the chamber—it might be helpful to say to you, Presiding Officer, that I will leave the chamber when I have answered the question—I will speak to the leader and the chief executive of South Lanarkshire Council to hear their perspectives. The call that I had with the leader and chief executive of North Lanarkshire Council was helpful in that it provided some clarity and specific information about what that authority is doing to tackle the issue.

I appreciate that people in Lanarkshire will be anxious, so I assure Mr Kelly that the Government wants to avoid making that designation if we can, but we must take cognisance of the evidence.

In relation to financial support, the Government has set out the measures that will be available to support business over the period. We will continue to hold dialogue with businesses. The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture and the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Tourism have been in dialogue with the hospitality sector and the business community over the weekend. I hope that gives some reassurance to Mr Kelly about how the Government is approaching the issue.

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** Covid data is being published locally, and I note what the Deputy First Minister said about discussions with local authorities. Is the Scottish Government considering applying restrictions by local authority area rather than by health board area? Midlothian, in my constituency, is lumped in with the city of Edinburgh. That will possibly put it in the same tier as Edinburgh, with all the restrictions that might not be suitable for the area, and the consequences for businesses and individuals in my constituency that will flow from that.

**John Swinney:** The building blocks of the levels framework will all be set by local authority area. That is a move away from where we have been, so far.

I did not answer Mr Kelly's question about timing and decision making. We expect to come to final decisions on the first allocation of levels on Wednesday evening or Thursday morning, with regulations being put before Parliament on Thursday. The regulations will set out what levels local authorities will be going on to. That will be done by local authority area, not by health board area.

**Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I listened to the response to Sarah Boyack's question on the gestation period. Hospitality has now been closed for more than two weeks, so I presume that it cannot be a source of transmission. To assist understanding of the decisions that are being taken, will the Scottish Government tell us exactly where transmission is taking place?

**John Swinney:** My point about gestation of the virus is about contacts between individuals. The virus is spread by human transmission and by contamination of surfaces. The gestation period is not related to how long a sector has been closed or operating on a restricted basis. There are elements of hospitality that are still operating and there will be seeds of the virus in the community. We are trying to reduce the prevalence of the virus.

I know that Elaine Smith takes a close interest in the Lanarkshire area. We are seeing a slowing of the rate of increase, which is a cause for optimism. It has not yet gone into decline, but the rate of increase has slowed. That is welcome in the decision-making process in which we are currently involved.

### **Covid-19 Restrictions (Hospitality Businesses)**

**3. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what support is being given to hospitality businesses

that cannot operate due to Covid-19 restrictions. (S5T-02463)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Tourism (Fergus Ewing):** On 21 October, the First Minister announced an extension of the restrictions that were imposed on 9 October and further additional financial support for the businesses that are affected by the restrictions. More than £40 million will now be distributed through the Covid-19 restrictions fund, including grant support for hospitality and other businesses that are required by law to close.

**Murdo Fraser:** My constituent Dave Barclay runs the Airlie Street Bar in Alyth, in Perthshire. Like many traditional pubs, it has no outside space and does not serve food, so the current Covid restrictions mean that it has to close. If Mr Barclay's pub were in the central belt of Scotland, he would be entitled to a grant of £4,310, but, because he is in Perth and Kinross, he will get precisely half that—just £2,155. Mr Barclay thinks that that is central belt bias. Is he correct?

**Fergus Ewing:** I do not see it in that light. The grants will be available from 2 November. As is outlined in the strategic framework that was announced on 23 October, grants of £2,000 or £3,000, depending on rateable value, will be available to businesses that are required by law to close. A hardship grant, depending on rateable value, will be available for businesses that remain open but are directly impacted by the restrictions. Those grants will be provided regardless of level to any eligible business and will be paid in fortnightly instalments.

I am acutely aware that the impacts on the hospitality industry across the board have been horrendous and catastrophic. I am happy to look at any individual case about which the member writes to me, and I will do my best to be as sympathetic as possible. We desperately want to provide the financial support to businesses to enable them to make it through to the other side of the crisis, but one of the challenges is that we do not know quite when that will be.

I undertake to look sympathetically at any case for which I have the full details in front of me. I will consider such cases in detail and take the time that each individual person and business deserves.

**Murdo Fraser:** I thank the cabinet secretary for that response. Mr Barclay is not required in law to close, but the practicality of not having outside space and not serving food means that he has no alternative—he cannot run his business in any other fashion.

As the cabinet secretary accepts, there are huge problems right across the hospitality sector. We learned today that the historic Queens hotel in

Perth is facing permanent closure, with the loss of jobs.

We know that the Scottish Government has received an additional £700 million from the UK Government, bringing the total additional funding from the UK Government in the current financial year to £7.2 billion. How much of that money has been allocated to supporting the hospitality sector?

**Fergus Ewing:** Since the crisis began some considerable time ago, a substantial amount has been provided to support the hospitality sector. I am pleased that local authorities and the enterprise agencies have stepped up to the mark and are working extremely hard to get that money out. We have sought at least to match the funding that has been available down south.

I am acutely aware of the impact on hotels in rural locations such as the area that Mr Fraser mentioned. I know that Highlands and Islands Enterprise and South of Scotland Enterprise have devoted a lot of time to speaking to individual businesses and helping them where they can.

Along with my colleague Fiona Hyslop and others, I was able to set up the pivotal enterprise fund and the creative, tourism and enterprise hardship funds, which total £121.8 million and £23.5 million respectively. Those funds have gone some way to addressing the problem. I am not sure that there have been any counterpart funds of that type in England, nor that there has been a counterpart to our hotel support programme of £40 million or our newly self-employed hardship fund.

Nonetheless, it is not a competition. Although we have done better than England in some areas—perhaps Mr Fraser would argue that the converse is true; I do not know, but he has not done so yet—my job is not to make such comparisons. My job is to ensure, working with my colleagues—Kate Forbes in finance and Fiona Hyslop in enterprise, in particular—that we reach out to every business and provide them with the hardship financial support that they need to bridge the gap to the other side of the crisis.

It is not an easy task. We have sought to engage the UK Government in that task from the outset, and Nigel Huddleston, the tourism minister, has been very helpful and constructive. However, it is fair to say—as the Deputy First Minister said earlier regarding the most recent announcement of £700 million—that we simply do not have the detail of the support yet. I hope that we will have it soon.

**Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** I have been contacted by constituents in Glasgow and people from elsewhere in Scotland who are working in hospitality businesses and who have been told by their employers not to install the Protect Scotland

app on their phones or told to keep their phones switched off while they are at work. Some who have been contacts of positive test cases have been told not to self-isolate by their employers or told that, if they do, it will be viewed as unauthorised and unpaid absence.

What action can the Scottish Government take against such employers—some of whom are well-known high-street names in hospitality and retail—who so dangerously put their business interests ahead of the lives of their workforce and their customers? Does the Scottish Government support the Unite hospitality rescue plan, which involves routine regular testing for hospitality workers and bringing sick pay for those in isolation up to full pay?

**Fergus Ewing:** As a matter of general principle, employers have an absolute duty to cater for the safety of their staff and their customers. Of course they do—no one could conceivably disagree with that, and everybody must recognise that it is a fundamental duty. Mr Harvie has not mentioned any specific examples. If he has any such examples, I will consider them with colleagues—it is correct that I do so—should he wish to write to me.

However—in the interests of brevity, this is the last thing that I will say—I have, as much as any member in the chamber, been in touch with businesses daily over the past 10 months, including this morning, and I have to say that the overwhelming majority of business leaders take their responsibilities extremely seriously. Not only that, but they have invested substantial amounts of money in protecting the health and safety of their staff and customers as well as taking all steps to ensure that appropriate training is provided.

I hope and believe that the types of behaviour to which Mr Harvie referred are the exception—a relatively small exception—and not the rule, and I hope that he will understand that, unless I get specific examples, it is difficult for me to go beyond what I have said today. Nevertheless, I will, of course, look at any specific case that he wishes to refer to me, and I will do so carefully.

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** Further to Murdo Fraser's questions, pubs that do not sell food and do not have outside spaces are, to all intents and purposes, forced to close because they cannot make a living out of selling soft drinks on their own. The Scottish Government is therefore shirking its responsibility by saying that they can stay open and sell soft drinks.

I appeal to the cabinet secretary for the same support to be made available to those establishments as is being granted to those that are legally obliged to close. We know that cafes

and restaurants are allowed to stay open until 6 o'clock to deal with isolation and loneliness, and the pubs concerned serve that same purpose for men who will not use cafes or restaurants but whose mental health is at stake. We need to preserve those businesses.

**Fergus Ewing:** I understand the point that Rhoda Grant is making, which was also made by Mr Fraser. She has accepted that the closure is not required by law; it is a de facto matter, rather than an ex lege matter. Nonetheless, Ms Grant makes a not-unreasonable point. The grants system that we have produced has a closure fund and a hardship fund. The funding must be relatively clear, and I believe that we have set it out clearly.

However, this is an on-going debate in which we are considering how to respond most appropriately to the public, accounting for public money while recognising private need. I hear what the member says, and we can obviously give further consideration to these matters. Nevertheless, as things stand, such premises are able to trade lawfully, albeit that, in some cases, as Rhoda Grant says, there may be a very limited market for a pub that is unable to sell alcohol.

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** I take the cabinet secretary's point that we do not want to compare things with England all the time, but, although it appears that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has given a blank cheque to English businesses, that does not appear to be available to Scottish businesses. Can the cabinet secretary confirm that the situation is unfair for Scottish businesses and that either the Scottish Government should have those powers or Westminster should be providing the money?

**Fergus Ewing:** Without making a political point, I note that the fact that we do not have clarity about the £700 million that was announced two weeks ago simply means that, from a legal point of view and from the point of view of Kate Forbes, who, as the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, is governed by strict rules regarding the disbursement of public money, until such time as there is a proper exchange of information on the matter, the situation is just not acceptable.

As the Deputy First Minister said, the finance secretary wrote to the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 20 October, which is now a relatively long time ago, with regard to Covid. I respectfully suggest that the full details be provided as soon and as swiftly as possible. That would allow us better to get on with the job that we all have in trying to serve the people of Scotland.

## Personal Protective Equipment (VAT)

**4. Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what it considers the impact will be in Scotland of the reintroduction of VAT on personal protective equipment. (S5T-02473)

**The Minister for Public Finance and Migration (Ben Macpherson):** The Scottish Government firmly disagrees with the United Kingdom Government's decision to reintroduce VAT on PPE at this time, and we will be pressing for the decision to be reversed. Unfortunately, the decision was taken without consultation with Scottish stakeholders, which has made it extremely difficult for us to analyse the impact that it will have in critical areas.

This UK Government decision is likely to be of significant concern to many stakeholders, including social care providers, which are already working hard to ensure that those who work in social care settings are provided with sufficient PPE over the winter months. They will now be worried about the impact of this VAT cost increase.

**Bruce Crawford:** When I first heard that VAT was being put back on PPE, I thought that it was surely a joke—it could not be a serious proposition. Does the minister agree with Donald Macaskill, the chief executive officer of Scottish Care, who wrote:

"To put #VAT back on #PPE in the middle of the #SecondWave of #Covid19 is pure madness. You have just made saving lives 20% dearer. Time for a rethink @RishiSunak"?

I agree 100 per cent with Donald Macaskill on this. Has the Scottish Government made representation to the UK Government on the matter?

**Ben Macpherson:** I, too, agree 100 per cent with Donald Macaskill on the issue. The Scottish Government agrees that it makes no sense to remove that VAT relief at this time. The decision by the UK Government was unexpected and was made without consultation with Scottish Government officials or stakeholders. We believe that it should be reversed and we will press the UK Government on that.

**Bruce Crawford:** Thank you. Has the Scottish Government made any assessment of the additional costs to the Scottish Government, local authorities and care providers? Does the minister agree that the Treasury's decision to impose the mask tax must be reversed, because it has the potential to do significant harm and undermine the fight against Covid-19?

**Ben Macpherson:** Given the lack of notice and the unexpected nature of the decision, as I said in my previous response, we are now in the process



of carrying out an urgent assessment of the additional costs of the decision, including the costs for care providers. As Mr Crawford alluded, in these times, if the UK Government is considering anything, it should be extending the relief to things that help to protect against the virus, such as face coverings, rather than putting the tax back on PPE.

Considering the extent of the taxation powers that the UK Government has at its fingertips, I am astonished that, in order to raise revenue, it is choosing to remove VAT relief on PPE rather than introduce something like a windfall tax. We will press the UK Government to reverse its decision, and we will engage as constructively as possible with all Scottish stakeholders and continue to assess the impact of the decision. As I said, we will press for its reversal, because it is the wrong decision.

### Test and Protect Data

**5. Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will publish details of organisations with whom test and protect data can be shared, and for what purposes. (S5T-02472)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman):** Privacy and data security are very important to the Scottish Government and NHS Scotland.

As test and protect is made up of a number of different strands, such as testing, contact tracing and the Protect Scotland app, a number of data protection impact assessments have been undertaken. They set out what data is collected, how it is shared, with whom and for what purpose. Where appropriate, they are accompanied by relevant privacy notices.

The Scottish Government already publishes details of organisations with which test and protect data is shared—and for what purposes—on the main NHS Scotland information governance website—[*Interruption.*] Excuse my coughing. Data is shared only when that is needed for public health purposes. Although the information is available in many documents, if the member would find it helpful, I am happy to commit to bringing all of it together in one document.

**Liam McArthur:** Thank you. I am grateful to the health secretary for persevering through that response.

Of course, how such data is shared is a matter of public interest. The test and protect system relies on public confidence. If people stop freely sharing information, for whatever reason, the system cannot work.

Professor Stephen Reicher, who is advising the Government, said that sharing contact tracing information with the police is

“the perfect way to stop people getting tested and providing their contacts.”

The fear of reprisals cannot outweigh the public health priority of finding out where people have been and the contacts they have had. If people stretch the rules, is it not better to know that?

**Jeane Freeman:** I am grateful to the member for his supplementary question. I assure everyone that it is not a persistent cough and that I have not lost my sense of taste or smell.

The member is absolutely right, and I agree with Professor Reicher. We and NHS Scotland do not share personal information from test and protect exercises with the police. In fact, personal information is not shared with the Government; it is shared only with health boards, so that they can follow up index cases, and with local authorities, so that they can follow up in offering inreach support for those who have been asked to self-isolate.

However, as I said, I am very happy to bring together and make available to all members, in one single document to be lodged in the Scottish Parliament information centre, information about all the organisations with which data, including personal data, is shared and for what purpose, so that everyone can be assured—and therefore be able to reassure their constituents—about the seriousness with which we treat privacy and the collection of data, in order to ensure that people have confidence in the test and protect app and process.

**Liam McArthur:** I thank the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport for that reassurance, and I seek further reassurance. Last Thursday, the Scottish Government's statistics reported a 72 per cent increase in fraud. We know already that test and protect has been mimicked by fraudsters. If the system is to work, people need to know that they can trust test and protect callers. Will the cabinet secretary therefore set out what people should be looking for, so that they can know that the real test and protect is on the line?

**Jeane Freeman:** I am very happy to do that. I do not have the detail of that with me, and I would not want to get any part of it wrong, because it is really important. Therefore, this afternoon, my office will send that information in a note to Mr McArthur and all members, so that they are clear that there is a very particular process that test and protect contact tracers go through in order to assure the person they are contacting that they are from the NHS test and protect programme and to assist in avoiding anyone attempting to scam that exercise.

**Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP):** Can data that is gathered by the essential test and trace system, such as personal phone numbers, be used to enforce isolation on those who have been contacted after their contact with an infected individual?

**Jeane Freeman:** We cannot enforce isolation on any individual, just as we cannot make people follow the public health guidance. We have to convince people of the benefits of doing that—including self-isolation, hard though that is—in order to protect themselves, their families and, in that collective exercise, each other.

This virus is different, as is how we must deal with it. It is genuinely a public health response. That means that the decisions that I make—as an individual, not as the cabinet secretary—have an impact on everyone in the chamber. If I choose not to wear a mask when walking around the building, nor to wash my hands or keep to a 2m distance, and so on, that puts at risk everyone with whom I come into contact. I do those things not just to protect myself and those whom I love, but to protect everybody else. That is what we require.

We cannot force people to do those things, and we recognise that self-isolation is quite a big ask of individuals in different circumstances. Fourteen days is a long time, and their personal circumstances may make it difficult. A member talked about the financial difficulties that self-isolation can bring to people. That is why we have—as much as we can—taken steps to offer financial support to some individuals in those circumstances and, through our local authority colleagues, to offer any other support that might be needed—for example, in getting food, walking the dog or whatever it might be—so that people can self-isolate, which is what we really need.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you. That concludes topical question time. We will shortly move on to the next item of business.

## Inward Investment Plan

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame):** The next item of business is a statement by Ivan McKee on Scotland's inward investment plan. The minister will take questions at the end of his statement; there should therefore be no interventions or interruptions.

15:14

**The Minister for Trade, Investment and Innovation (Ivan McKee):** Today, the Scottish Government publishes "Shaping Scotland's Economy: Scotland's Inward Investment Plan". I am pleased to outline to Parliament how it will help to shape Scotland's economy.

The plan is the second of three pillars that focus on internationalising the Scottish economy. The first pillar was the export growth plan—"Scotland: a trading nation: A plan for growing Scotland's exports"—and the final one will be our international capital investment plan. All three will be framed by our trade principles paper, which will emphasise the importance of values and of building a fairer Scotland.

Scotland has a strong track record in attracting inward investment. For the past seven years, Scotland has attracted the most inward investment projects of any United Kingdom nation or region outside London. Inward investment has a positive and significant impact on Scotland's economy. It provides 624,000 jobs, which is more than a third of total employment. It contributes almost £42 billion in gross value added and represents 50 per cent of business turnover. It also generates more than 60 per cent of our business spending on research and development, and more than three quarters of Scotland's exports.

Because there is a strong positive relationship with productivity, with innovation and with trade, inward investment also strengthens and complements domestic business. It helps to transfer skills, build innovative capacity, support local supply chains and spur exports, thereby creating a more open and outward-facing economy. It also gives local businesses access to global technology, talent and markets. The time is right to build on those strong foundations and to optimise the opportunities and benefits that inward investment brings to our economy and society.

"Shaping Scotland's Economy: Scotland's Inward Investment Plan" sets out the actions that we will take to help to create a net zero economy that is built on the principles of fair work and inclusive growth, to create opportunities for women and men across Scotland.

The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for greater resilience in our economy and the need to build back better. The inward investment plan therefore represents a fundamental shift in focus.

Investors assess key factors including availability of skills, strength of supply chains and access to technology when they make decisions about establishing or expanding their operations. In Scotland, we have been successful at persuading a range of companies that were interested in locating in Scotland to do so.

We now want to apply a more strategic approach, whereby we will focus on the sectors in which Scotland has genuine global strengths, set out our stall confidently to those whose values align with ours, work cohesively across Scotland's regions to attract inward investment that builds on our many local strengths, and be laser-focused on maximising wider economic and social benefits for local economies and communities. Scotland's strong position as a progressive, inclusive and outward-looking country will be central to our partnership offer to investors. We want to attract companies, entrepreneurs, businesses and workforces who share our values and can help us to progress our economic ambitions.

Our robust analytical approach has identified nine opportunity areas in which Scotland's genuine global strengths—many of which are built on our academic excellence—align with global investment opportunities, and offer the most potential for maximising economic benefits across Scotland. Running through those opportunity areas are our focuses on net zero emissions, digital, and high-value manufacturing. The first of those areas is energy transition—the shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources, and use of decarbonisation to reduce emissions across a range of energy-intensive sectors by leveraging our natural resources and deep-water expertise.

The second area is decarbonisation of transport, with a focus on low-carbon powertrains, primarily in heavy-duty vehicles.

The third area is software and information technology—from software development and IT services to games development and telecommunications. That will involve leveraging our globally recognised excellence in informatics and artificial intelligence.

The fourth area is digital financial services, through innovative application of new technology and data to transform how financial services and products are delivered, thereby building on our world-leading fintech cluster.

The fifth area is business services. The global business services sector has experienced a period of significant change from delivery of transactional

services to delivery of more complex and higher-value services.

The sixth area is Scotland's world leading space sector, which is already manufacturing more satellites than are being manufactured anywhere outside California. There is ambition to deliver an end-to-end solution for small-satellite manufacture, launch and data analysis, with a focus on tackling environmental challenges.

The seventh area is health tech, including integrated digital health technology that utilises data capture and analysis, sensors and AI, alongside our world-leading expertise in precision medicine.

The eighth area is transformation of chemical industries, including industrial biotechnology, which is an emerging clean technology that can support the transition from petrochemical-based industries to sustainable manufacturing, using renewable feedstocks.

The final area is innovation in our world-renowned food and drink sector. We will contribute to our ambition for Scotland to be a good food nation by developing food production systems that help to achieve the net zero emissions target. We will do that by introducing advanced manufacturing technologies that improve productivity and sustainability, and by creating healthier food and drink products.

We will build regional clusters of expertise around specific strengths to make Scotland a more attractive proposition for potential investors, and to ensure that all parts of Scotland benefit. Space, for example, is a future opportunity area for Shetland, Moray, Edinburgh, south-east Scotland, Glasgow, the Western Isles and Sutherland.

Food and drink innovation is already strong in the Highlands and Islands, the north-east, the south of Scotland, Glasgow and Argyll and Bute, and there is significant potential for growth across all those regions and more.

Although there remains uncertainty about the long-term impacts of Covid-19, independent analysis suggests that our opportunity areas are likely to be among the more resilient throughout and beyond the pandemic. We will seek investment opportunities that offer higher spillover benefits for the domestic economy, so that inward investment contributes to economic recovery as well as helping to shape Scotland's future economy.

The revised approach seeks to deliver 100,000 jobs over the next decade. The focus on wider spillover benefits could deliver significant additional benefits to Scotland's economy over the next two decades, including a £4 billion increase in

annual gross domestic product, a £2.1 billion increase in exports and a 1.2 per cent increase in Government revenue, which would represent an additional £680 million a year, at current prices.

That will ensure that indigenous businesses throughout Scotland have the opportunity to benefit, and that we can develop strong domestic supply chains and provide new skills and job opportunities for Scotland's people. Delivering additional high-value jobs is a key benefit for our nation. Scotland's skilled workforce is its number 1 asset, so we now need to ensure that our workforce has all the skills that are needed to attract greater flows of inward investment, and so that we benefit from the new jobs that will be created.

We will undertake a digital skills drive to increase the number of people with advanced digital skills. That will also help to retrain and re-employ people who have been losing jobs in other sectors due to the pandemic, which will help the wider economy, as well as individuals, their families and communities.

Home working is not a new concept, but it has become more significant in response to the Covid crisis. There will be a strong role for Scotland to play in the pivot to a remote-working or distributed-working model. Aligned to development of our "Moving to Scotland" resource, we will focus our effort on promoting Scotland as a global leader in the creation of a supportive environment for remote, distributed and local working.

Our targeted approach to inward investment creates significant potential for innovation and enhanced research and development. We will build on existing activity—including Interface, our seven innovation centres, the new National Manufacturing Institute and our industry leadership groups—to further strengthen the ties between academia and industry, and to ensure that our higher education institutions maximise their contribution to attracting inward investment. A key aspect of supporting stronger ties between academia and industry will be work with universities to agree a collective approach to stimulating inward investment and innovation, including through handling of intellectual property.

We need a clear-sighted laser focus to succeed in delivering on the ambitions in "Shaping Scotland's Economy: Scotland's Inward Investment Plan". We will focus on strategic investments that will shape places and deliver high-value jobs, with the ultimate aim of allocating £20 million per annum to that work. We will streamline and align our approach across the entire team Scotland international effort behind this new strategic direction. That will include supporting specific "Scotland is now" marketing activity to promote our nine opportunity areas to

international audiences, and to get the message across that Scotland is open for business to everyone who shares our vision and values.

I am acutely aware that I am launching the inward investment plan at a time of huge uncertainty. Here in Scotland and around the world, Covid-19 continues to create economic harm, and to have dreadful impacts on people's health and wellbeing. Although many businesses are focused on simply keeping afloat, we are determined to build back better and to use the disruption that is being caused to address vulnerabilities and fragilities—not least in global supply chains. Despite the pandemic, companies continue to choose to invest in Scotland, including, in recent months, tech businesses Trustpilot, Illuminate Technologies and AdInMo. Only this month, the global life science business Thermo Fisher Scientific announced the creation of another 200 jobs at its site in Perth.

We also face Brexit at the end of the year. Whether there is no deal or a bad deal, all the analysis shows that Brexit will harm many parts of Scotland's economy. We must work even harder to put across the message that Scotland is not the UK, and that our values and ambitions are different from those of the UK Government. That backdrop makes Scotland's inward investment plan all the more urgent and vital. Leaving things to chance would risk the progress and success that we have had to date. To put it simply, I say that now—more than ever—we need to have in place a plan for inward investment that targets effort and resource strategically, to shape Scotland's economy in the future.

I am therefore proud to be the minister who is presenting "Shaping Scotland's Economy: Scotland's Inward Investment Plan" to Parliament today, and will be happy to take members' questions on it.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We have about 20 minutes for questions. I ask members who wish to put questions to press their request-to-speak buttons now.

**Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con):** I thank the minister for advance sight of his statement. Any move to create jobs in Scotland is to be welcomed, especially given the economic disruption that our country is experiencing. However, although I applaud such efforts, I am sceptical about the promises that have been made.

Today the minister has promised to boost digital skills, yet the digital growth scheme has managed to pay out only 13 per cent of the funds that were promised in relation to it. He has also promised to create 100,000 jobs, but the Scottish National Party Government has managed to deliver only

2,000 of the 28,000 green jobs that Alex Salmond promised. In fact, there could have been 260,000 extra jobs here in Scotland if the SNP had matched the UK Government's job creation rate since coming into office.

With such a track record of broken promises and economic failure, can the minister provide any assurance that today's promises will be delivered?

**Ivan McKee:** I simply point to Scotland's track record. As I said in my statement, Scotland holds the record for being the best-performing part of the UK outside London. It is better at attracting inward investment than the northern powerhouse, the east or west Midlands or any other part of the UK. Scotland has proudly held the record for doing so not just in the past year, the year before or the year before that, but in each of the past seven years.

The plan focuses that approach on sectors in which we genuinely have global strengths, of which Scotland has many. Its contents are based on analysis and are achievable and deliverable. The Government is committed to delivering what needs to be done to make such growth happen for Scotland's economy.

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** I, too, thank the minister for prior sight of his statement. The plan is full of aspirations that cannot be argued with, but unfortunately the minister did not say much about how they will be delivered. The aspiration that the energy transition will lead to jobs is welcome, but it rings hollow given this week's news that Burntisland Fabrications has been unable to secure any contracts. Why has the Scottish Government withdrawn its support for BiFab, leading to the bid for work on Neart na Gaoithe being withdrawn?

**Ivan McKee:** Rhoda Grant will be aware that my colleague the Cabinet Secretary for the Economy, Fair Work and Culture spoke to members on that subject this morning. The cabinet secretary will be making further statements in the chamber on the specifics of the situation, so I will not comment further on those aspects, given that it will be her place to do that when she is able to do so.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Eleven members want to ask questions. I want to get to them all, but we must stop at 3.45 so I ask for short questions and succinct answers please.

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** I warmly welcome the cabinet secretary's statement. In response to a question that I asked on 2 September, the First Minister said:

"The decommissioning of Hunterston B power station raises challenges, but it also raises opportunities in relation to our energy mix and community and economic regeneration. It is important that we work collaboratively to

seize those opportunities."—[*Official Report*, 2 September 2020; c 24.]

In the eight weeks since then, what steps have been taken to take such opportunities forward, specifically with a view to attracting inward investment to Hunterston Port and Resource Centre and its environs?

**Ivan McKee:** Kenny Gibson is right to highlight Hunterston, which offers exactly the sort of opportunity that we envisage for the new plan in helping to shape Scotland's economy. We are all aware of the huge potential that Scotland has in its renewable energy resources, which is why energy transition is one of the nine opportunity areas identified in the plan. We will therefore work specifically to attract inward investment in that area, which will benefit Hunterston Port and Resource Centre, with the aim of creating much-needed high-value jobs and prosperity for north Ayrshire.

**Michelle Ballantyne (South Scotland) (Con):** Although the ambitions set out in the statement are admirable, we are still remarkably short on detail—particularly on how we might make the digital economy a growth sector for all of Scotland.

The Logan review noted that 17 per cent of Scottish secondary schools do not have computer science teachers. Meanwhile, courses at CodeClan cost £6,250 for 16 weeks, which is particularly prohibitive for those without sufficient resources. When those students do—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Please ask a question.

**Michelle Ballantyne:** What reassurances can the minister give investors that Scotland can grow and retain a workforce that has sufficient skills to build a digital economy?

**Ivan McKee:** I spend an awful lot of time talking to investors here and to investors who are looking to come to Scotland. Their admiration for the skills pipeline that we already have in Scotland shines through. The plan specifically recognises the issue. Should the member choose to read them, she will see that there are 18 actions, one of which is about digital skills and growing the digital pipeline from 4,000 to 10,000 individuals per year, which is more than double.

We are clear on the specifics of what needs to be done. The plan works alongside a suite of the Scottish Government's other plans, including, as the member rightly recognises, the Logan review, which goes into quite a bit of detail on strengthening the digital skills pipeline and other aspects to help build and strengthen Scotland's already world-leading digital economy.

**Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP):** The minister will be aware that the Covid-

19 pandemic has had a huge economic impact and that it has affected inward investment. How will the investment plan support a green recovery from the pandemic, particularly in areas such as mine, where the economy was already suppressed pre-Covid?

**Ivan McKee:** On successful inward investments, last year I visited Diodes Incorporated, where I met with the team that made a significant inward investment in a strong business in the member's constituency.

Of course the Covid-19 pandemic is having a significant impact on the economy here and around the world. Our analysis identified the nine sectors before Covid and we reviewed that analysis on the basis of the Covid impact. Independent global research points to the fact that all of the nine sectors that we identified where Scotland has genuine global strengths are either resilient to the Covid pandemic in relation to their economic potential or have potential to grow as a consequence of the economic shifts that have happened due to the pandemic. Therefore, we are confident that our choice of sectors is strong and robust and that Scotland is in a good place to develop and build on that success.

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** There is such a thing as collective responsibility, so I am afraid that the minister cannot dodge questions about BiFab, where there was inward investment by DF Barnes from Canada. The minister says that energy transition is an important area of inward investment, and I agree with him. Why, therefore, did the Cabinet Secretary for the Economy, Fair Work and Culture tell BiFab on 19 September that it should go into administration?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That is not actually a question on the statement.

**Ivan McKee:** I am happy to answer the question. Jackie Baillie is absolutely right: of course energy transition is an area where we want to focus on inward investment. To answer her question directly, what she suggests is not the case—the cabinet secretary informs me that she did not do that, and she will give full information to Parliament on the specifics of the BiFab situation and members will have the opportunity to respond.

**Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green):** An International Monetary Fund study in 2019 found that 38 per cent of foreign direct investment was phantom investment used for tax avoidance. At the same time, a Fraser of Allander study showed that £9.2 billion of economic value—5.5 per cent of gross domestic product—created in Scotland left Scotland in 2017. I see no analysis of that in the plan. Could the minister tell me what plans he has to ensure that FDI does not involve phantom

investment or billions of pounds of outflow in economic value?

**Ivan McKee:** The reality is actually the opposite. I have gone through the numbers. More than 600,000 jobs in Scotland are dependent on inward investment, it is a significant contributor to business turnover; and it supports more than three quarters of exports and more than 60 per cent of business research and development. Inward investment is a very significant component of Scotland's economic performance, and it is to be welcomed where it aligns with our values and our target sectors. Andy Wightman talks about phantom investment, but I am talking about businesses that invest to create jobs and build assets in Scotland's economy. The member's analysis does not stand up, given what we are talking about. Inward investment creates the jobs and builds the businesses in Scotland that create value for Scotland's economy.

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** What has the minister learned from the so-called "Scottish shambles" in 2016 when the Government signed a £10 billion agreement with a Chinese company and all it owned was a pub in Oxford? Fourteen years ago, when Jim Wallace was the enterprise minister, life sciences were a priority sector; why is that no longer the case?

**Ivan McKee:** On that last point, life sciences are very much a priority sector. If the member had been listening to my statement, he would have heard that health technology is central to the plan. We have identified the huge strengths that Scotland has in the life sciences sector, and particularly in precision medicine. I am proud to be a co-chair of the life sciences industry leadership group, which goes from strength to strength. I continually have meetings on inward investment in the sector. As I mentioned in my statement, Thermo Fisher Scientific is creating 200 jobs as part of the strong life sciences sector in Scotland. That sector is very much part of the plan.

On the specific point that the member raises, he will find throughout the plan the strong theme on the importance of Scotland's values. We want to build a wellbeing economy in Scotland and talk with investors that share those values. That is very much at the core of the message that we take to investors and at the core of the activities on which we want to work in partnership with investors to help to build a strong wellbeing economy in Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Five members still want to ask questions, so let us move along.

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** How has Scotland performed on inward investment in the past and what effect will the strategic approach to attracting investment, through measures such

as the Scottish growth scheme, have on Scotland's economy?

**Ivan McKee:** Emma Harper represents another area of Scotland that has particular strengths in the food and drink sector. We want to build on innovation in that sector as part of Scotland's strategic approach to inward investment.

As I said in my statement and in answer to an earlier question, for the past seven years, Scotland has been the best performing part of the UK outside London in attracting inward investment. We recognise that we can do more to maximise the wider spillover benefits of that investment. If Scotland maximised our performance in that respect, we would be able to generate over £4 billion more in GDP per year in Scotland; an extra £2 billion in annual exports from Scotland; 100,000 jobs over the next decade; and more than £600 million in annual tax revenues as a consequence. Therefore, the prize is large and it is real, and we are focused on delivering it through the execution of the actions in the plan.

**Gordon Lindhurst (Lothian) (Con):** The minister's statement makes no mention at all of free ports, and nor does his plan. Does the minister accept the benefit that the UK Government's plan for free ports in Scotland could have and is he willing to work with the UK Government for the benefit of Scotland's communities that could be boosted by such ports in the coming years?

**Ivan McKee:** The member should be aware, if he has been briefed properly, that engagement with the UK Government on free ports continues. Officials are engaging regularly. In the past few weeks, I had a meeting with Steve Barclay, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, specifically on that point, and I also gave evidence on the issue to the House of Commons International Trade Committee.

Perhaps the member does not know what is happening; Alister Jack certainly does not, because I saw him on television on Sunday and, frankly, he did not understand the level of engagement that has been taking place. He has clearly been badly briefed, too.

The problem with free ports is that the UK Government has not yet told us, other than in a flashy headline, what the substance of those will be. The UK Government has not explained what the tax incentives will be, either through customs regulations and tariffs or through reserved taxes. We do not know what the proposal is down south for what would be devolved taxes and how much we would have to fund on that basis. The UK Government has not given us a range of other information that we have asked for on economic

impact and the potential for economic displacement.

As a responsible Government that is looking at Scotland's economy in a responsible way, we want to understand what the risks of free ports are as well as the opportunities before we determine what makes sense and whether we should or should not take them forward.

The member should of course recognise that free ports are a sticking plaster on the gaping wound that has been caused by the economic self-harm as a consequence of the UK Government's decision to plough ahead with a completely misjudged exit from the European Union at the end of this year.

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** The minister mentioned the nine opportunity areas. Can he say how those were chosen, given that some people might be surprised that, for example, space is one of them?

**Ivan McKee:** With pleasure. It was done through a piece of analysis working on three axes. One of the axes was Scotland's demonstrated comparative advantage in various sectors; the second was the flows across Europe of inward investment in each of the sectors; and the third was the potential impact through wider economic benefits and how we maximise those. A considerable piece of analytical work was done to crunch through the numbers and come up with the priority sectors.

As I said, the final lens that the issue was viewed through latterly was the international analysis on the impact of Covid in each of the sectors. When we looked at all four axes, those nine priority sectors stood out strongly.

Space is a small sector, but it is growing very quickly. John Mason will be aware of the additional 600 jobs in the sector that have been announced in the past few days, many of which will be in our island communities. The space sector already employs 8,000 people. As I said, it is growing very quickly. I never fail to enjoy telling people that Glasgow produces more satellites than anywhere in the world apart from California.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We can fit in Colin Smyth and Rona Mackay if they are both brief.

**Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** The plan states that the benefits of employment by inward investors are felt across all of Scotland, but the Government's own figures show that the proportion of jobs that are supported by foreign direct investment across local authorities varies from close to 30 per cent to less than 5 per cent, with those low levels often being in rural areas.

What will the plan do to deliver inward investment specifically in rural communities, which are often low-wage communities? What information will be gathered to show whether that approach is more successful than the current strategy has been?

**Ivan McKee:** If the member reads through the plan, he will see that, for each of the nine opportunity areas, we identify specifically Scotland's assets. We provide nice wee graphical maps that show the parts of Scotland that would benefit in each of the nine opportunity areas. The south of Scotland figures largely in that, as do all parts of Scotland. The fact that we have been keen to focus on a regional approach is highlighted by a number of the actions that are mentioned in the plan.

It is a case of identifying the strengths that already exist in the regional economies of Scotland and understanding how we take those to market to attract investment that can work with each of those regional economies to develop our global strengths. Scotland is blessed with regional strengths right across our economy in many of the key sectors, and I look forward to working with regional partnerships to deliver on those strengths and attract jobs and investment right across Scotland as a consequence of the plan.

**Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP):** Does the minister agree that the knowledge and expertise that we have used to attract investment in the past will be very helpful in attracting investment in the future?

**Ivan McKee:** I very much agree. As I said, we have been successful in this area, but we recognise that there is more that we can do. The team Scotland approach is hugely valuable. In the export plan, we identified who we should work with. Scotland has a range of international assets that have already been deployed, formally and informally, including our trade envoys, our globalscot network, the Scottish Government's footprint, Scottish Development International's footprint, the wider diaspora, our many businesses, our universities and our alumni. Through our Scotland is now marketing campaign, the team Scotland approach leverages those assets to make sure that they are all deployed to target the inward investors that we want to attract to Scotland, which share our values, which are in the target sectors that we want to focus on and which can maximise the opportunity for economic development and job creation across all of Scotland's communities.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes questions on the statement. I thank the minister and members, as we managed to get through all the questions.

There will be a short pause before we move on to the next item of business.



## Covid-19: Scotland's Strategic Framework

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-23133, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on "COVID-19: Scotland's Strategic Framework".

15:44

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** In speaking to the motion in my name, I confirm that we will consider each Opposition amendment very carefully. Although we do not necessarily agree with all of them in their entirety, there are good suggestions in each, so regardless of how the votes go this evening, we will seek to take those suggestions forward constructively.

On Friday, the Scottish Government published our new strategic approach to tackling Covid, which included the proposed five levels of intervention. I will not repeat all the detail today, but I will set out some changes that we are proposing as a result of our considerations since Friday, and I will give a very preliminary indication of the levels that we think might apply to different parts of Scotland from next Monday. I draw members' attention to a technical paper that we have published today that gives more detail of the data and wider factors that will guide those decisions.

First, I will briefly summarise today's statistics, which were published a short time ago. The total number of positive cases that were reported yesterday was 1,327. The total number of confirmed cases in Scotland is now 59,201. The number of positive tests that were reported yesterday was 8.7 per cent of the total.

Currently, 1,100 people are in hospital, which is an increase of 48 from yesterday. For those who might think that we are being too tough with restrictions, it is worth noting that the number of people who are in hospital right now is just 400 short of the number of hospitalisations at the April peak. Eighty-two people are in intensive care, which is eight fewer than yesterday. I am sorry to report that, in the past 24 hours, 25 additional deaths have been registered, which takes the total number of deaths under that daily measurement to 2,726. I again send my condolences to all those who are grieving a loved one.

The rise in the number of cases in Scotland is part of an international pattern. It is reflected elsewhere in the United Kingdom, in Europe and around the world. Indeed, many countries across Europe in particular face a much more severe situation than we do currently. However, it is to try to avoid that kind of deterioration and mounting

pressure on our national health service that we are acting firmly at this stage. That is why we acted back in September to stop household gatherings and then took further action earlier this month to restrict hospitality.

The positive news is that we believe that the restriction on household gatherings may already be having an effect. The number of new cases is growing more slowly than it was at the start of the month, and we have not seen the nine-day doubling of cases that was predicted earlier this month. We hope that the effect of the difficult and, I know, unwelcome restrictions on hospitality, which have been in force now for just over two weeks, will soon start to be seen, too. Our hope is that the rate of increase in the number of new cases will slow even further and that we will then see a decline in the number of new cases.

If we do see that progress, it is important to stress that it will be down to a reduction in our interactions with each other as a result of the restrictions that are in place. It is important to bear that in mind as I run through some of the detail of the new levels because, although this is difficult for all of us and for many businesses, it is by reducing our interactions with people in other households and in environments with higher risks of transmission that we will continue to make progress.

All that said, our position just now is still fragile, and it is too early to draw firm conclusions. The number of cases is still rising, which is not a stable position to be in. Given that we are entering winter, Covid is likely to present a significant and continued challenge for us, with higher numbers of cases than we would want to see, for some time to come.

In addition, given the lag effect that is associated with the incubation period of the virus and how it affects people over time, we know that we are also likely to see the number of hospital and intensive care unit admissions and, unfortunately, deaths rise for some time yet, even as, we hope, the rate of increase in the number of cases continues to slow.

All that means that we must continue to be very cautious and take the action that is necessary to suppress the virus to the lowest possible levels. However, given that we are likely to be living with the virus for a while, it also means that we must try to be proportionate and as targeted as possible in the actions that we take.

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** I am keen to understand where we are on asymptomatic testing. Does the Government now accept that the benefit of the self-isolation of the 80 per cent of people who have the virus but do

not show symptoms outweighs any of the disadvantages?

**The First Minister:** We think that it is important and valuable to extend asymptomatic testing, and we have done that already. The clinical advice from our advisers, which was published in a paper last week, is that the priority should be to protect the most vulnerable. I will come on to that in a bit more detail later.

The first priority is testing people with symptoms, but we will not only extend asymptomatic testing for those who can help us to protect vulnerable groups; as we have set out, we will extend it further, as capacity allows, as part of our increased surveillance and in order to manage outbreaks. I agree with Willie Rennie in principle that asymptomatic testing is important, but we have to balance our capacity with the clinical priorities that have been set.

As I was saying, we know that the virus does direct harm to human lives and health, and we must minimise that, but we also know that the actions that we take to do that cause harm to the economy, living standards and wider health and wellbeing. The difficult task that all countries have is to balance all that and minimise the overall harm of the pandemic.

The strategic framework and the five levels are designed to help us do that. Having five levels does not prevent us from applying restrictions consistently across the country, if that is deemed necessary, but it means that we can avoid a one-size-fits-all approach if it is not. Having five levels will enable a part of the country with relatively low transmission to live with fewer restrictions than will apply to an area with much higher transmission. Such an approach is more proportionate, but the downside is that it makes the messages that we communicate more complex. To help with that, we will launch a new postcode checker that allows people to know what restrictions are in place in their area at any given time.

The detail within each level is intended to give people greater certainty of what to expect at different rates of transmission, but it is important that we retain some flexibility. I want to be clear that we will keep the detail of each level under review as the situation develops, which is a point that may be particularly important for the hospitality industry.

**Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab):** Will the First Minister advise the Parliament whether it will be given the opportunity to scrutinise the regulations connected to the new framework before they are implemented?

**The First Minister:** Yes. Graeme Dey will discuss with Opposition parties exactly how that will be done, and I hope that those discussions will

be fruitful. We suggest that perhaps a dual approach should be taken, in which relatively minor changes to the regulations go through the committee process and more substantial changes involve some plenary input from the Parliament. We are open-minded about that.

It is important to recognise that the levels will be implemented by what are, in effect, template regulations, which the COVID-19 Committee will be able to scrutinise in the normal way. Any changes involving areas going in or out of levels will also trigger changes to the regulations, which the committee will be able to scrutinise. If the changes are more substantial, I suspect that there will be a desire for the Parliament as a whole to be involved, so we will continue to try to seek—

**Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab):** Will the First Minister take an intervention?

**The First Minister:** I will take one more intervention before I try to make some progress.

**Neil Findlay:** Thanks very much. These are extremely difficult times for everybody—and for no one more than the First Minister, I am sure—but scrutiny is absolutely essential. At 12 o'clock today, we were given a number of documents to try to work our way through. This is very complex stuff. We have had no opportunity to consult businesses in our areas, local authorities or constituents, who are writing to us in their droves on a number of issues.

I make a plea to the First Minister. During consideration of emergency Brexit legislation, we were able to do things quickly in the Parliament, which allowed proper scrutiny. We cannot go on as we are at the moment, with things being imposed without scrutiny. *[Interruption.]* It is absolutely essential that we have proper scrutiny. My plea to the First Minister is that she opens the process up to far more scrutiny than we have had to date.

**The First Minister:** In principle, I agree with Neil Findlay and with the previous comment. The one caveat that I inject, as I have before, is that, unlike Brexit, we are dealing with an infectious virus. There is a real importance for the Government to be able to act quickly, where that is necessary and merited, and I think that people accept that. I absolutely agree that the further we go into this, the more we need to balance that ability to act with the legitimate demand for the Parliament not just to be consulted and able to scrutinise, but to be able to do that early and before changes are made, wherever that is possible. I give a commitment today to try to facilitate that as much as possible.

We are having a debate and a vote today on the overall framework. When we announce—I will come on to this in a second—the initial application

of the framework, that will trigger scrutiny of the regulations that will give effect to it. The regulations will be changed along with any change to the level of framework. There will be scrutiny in the ordinary course of events, but we want to try to build in greater scrutiny.

I appreciate that the Parliament gets information sometimes at short notice. We will try to provide as much notice as possible. Last week, I spent a total of almost three hours with the leaders of the other parties to try to give an early and developing understanding of what we were bringing to the Parliament today, and I found that very useful. I give a commitment that I will try, within the context of what we are dealing with right now, to involve the Parliament in as much scrutiny as possible.

I will try to make some progress and I will summarise for the Parliament the levels that we are proposing. Members should note that levels 1, 2 and 3 of the five levels are intended to be broadly comparable—albeit not identical—to the three levels deployed in England.

On Friday, I explained that the baseline level—zero—is the lowest level of restrictions. It is similar to the state of affairs that applied in August, when we had suppressed the virus to very low levels. We consider that to be the closest to normality that we can get to without better treatment or a vaccine for Covid. Of course, we remain hopeful about the prospects of both those scientific developments over the next few months.

Level 1 is similar to the restrictions that we had in mid-September as cases started to rise again, but prevalence remained very low. Our objective is to get all parts of the country to level 0 or level 1 and remain there if we can.

The restrictions that we propose for level 2 are similar to those that currently apply across Scotland outside the central belt.

Level 3 resembles the tougher restrictions that currently apply in the central belt.

Finally, level 4, which we hope not to have to use, envisages something closer to a full lockdown. For example, non-essential shops would close at that level. However, even at level 4, up to six people from two households could still meet outdoors, and manufacturing and construction businesses would stay open.

Levels 2 and 3 are intended to apply for short periods of time, and level 4 will be deployed only if absolutely necessary as a short, sharp intervention to address extremely high transmission rates.

Under all five levels, we want schools and childcare to remain open if at all possible.

Since we published the proposed levels on Friday, we have consulted various stakeholders. As I said, those consultations included discussions with Opposition leaders. Of course, it is not possible to accommodate all the asks of different sectors and still suppress the virus, but I can confirm that we have decided on some changes that will, I hope, be welcomed. Those changes relate to childcare, shared parenting and child contact centres; outdoor retail; bingo; and the numbers allowed at weddings at level 4. Full details are on the revised table that was circulated to MSPs earlier and they will be made available on the Scottish Government website.

Before I deal with hospitality in a bit of detail, as it is one of the sectors bearing the biggest impact of the current restrictions, I will mention one other, I hope temporary, change. The table that was published on Friday envisaged that, at level 1, we would be able to meet six people from two households in our own homes, but it also made it clear that that might change in some circumstances. The public health advice to ministers is that, if a decision is taken this week to move any area to level 1, the current prohibition on meeting anyone from other households in our own homes should remain in place for a period as an extra precaution. We intend to accept that advice, but that position will be reviewed weekly.

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** Will the First Minister take an intervention?

**The First Minister:** I will take one more intervention; I will then need to make some progress.

**Liam McArthur:** On that specific point, does the First Minister recognise that, in rural and smaller island areas in particular, the option of meeting in venues or, indeed, outside will be hugely problematic, particularly as we move into the winter months, and therefore the restriction in place is likely to reduce public confidence and possibly compliance with the restrictions that she is setting out?

**The First Minister:** I will deal with island communities in more detail shortly. I recognise that, and that is why I hope that the change will be a short-term and temporary one. It is advice about how we transition to the new system with appropriate precautions still in place.

I want to turn to hospitality, describe the restrictions that will apply in each level and outline any changes from the current situation. I hope that the changes will be welcome, but I know that the sector will have wanted to see fewer restrictions, especially at level 3. I will explain why we do not consider that to be possible at this stage, but I want to be clear that we will continue dialogue with the sector on the proposals that it has put forward.

We also intend to establish an expert advisory group on reintroducing safe low-level music and background noise.

At level 0, hospitality will operate almost normally, subject to rules on physical distancing, limits on numbers and other mitigations, such as table service only.

Level 1 will be similar, but with a curfew closing time. However, that will be 10.30 pm rather than 10 pm.

Level 2 is broadly comparable to the restrictions that are currently in place outside the central belt. Currently, in those areas, hospitality can operate normally outdoors with an early closing time. I know that that gets more difficult in the winter. That will continue to be the case under level 2, but the closing time will be extended to 10.30 pm. *[Interruption.]*

I will make a bit of progress, if that is okay. I promise that I will come back to the member if I have time.

Just now, premises in those areas can open indoors until 6 pm for the service of food and non-alcoholic drinks only. At level 2, that will be extended to 8 pm and alcohol will be permitted with main meals.

In the central belt areas that are under tougher restrictions just now, only cafes can open until 6 pm for food and non-alcoholic drinks. Level 3 is broadly similar to that, but all hospitality premises will be subject to the same rules: cafes, pubs and restaurants will be allowed to open until 6 pm for food and non-alcoholic drinks. At level 4, hospitality will be closed.

I know that the sector wants to see more activity allowed, especially at level 3, and we will continue to discuss that with it. However, I must stress that the areas at level 3 are those with the highest levels of infection currently. Our judgment is that to ease up any more at this stage, particularly as our progress remains so fragile, could risk tipping those levels closer to level 4, rather than have them make the progress that we want to see towards level 2.

Assuming that the Parliament agrees to the overall framework today, I will confirm on Thursday what level each local authority will be placed in initially. That will be with effect from Monday and it will be reviewed on a weekly basis. Those decisions will be based on advice from the Government's advisers and the national incident management team and we are also consulting local authorities. While we will initially apply levels to whole local authority areas, we will look in future at any situation where it might make sense to be more targeted; for example, there could be a

different approach for the Argyll islands than for the rest of the Argyll and Bute council area.

As I said earlier, we have published a technical paper detailing the factors and data that will guide those decisions. We will look at actual and projected cases per 100,000 of population and test positivity rates and projections for hospital and intensive care unit capacity. Different thresholds for those will apply at different levels. It is important to stress, though, that those decisions will not involve the automatic application of a single statistic or even a basket of statistics—those will inform and guide the decisions, but judgment will require to be applied to them. As we migrate initially to the new system, we will be deliberately cautious. As I said earlier, we are seeing signs of progress, but the situation is fragile and could go in the wrong direction, so we must take care.

I hope that over the next couple of weeks, if progress in slowing the rate of new cases continues, we will see more local authorities dropping down a level. However, initially, most are likely to stay in broadly the same category as they are in now. Final decisions have not yet been taken, but I want to give the Parliament a broad indication of what that means.

The central belt areas that are currently under the toughest restrictions are likely to be in level 3 initially and most of the rest of the country is likely to start in level 2. There are, however, some exceptions under consideration. First, it is hoped that the Highlands, Orkney, Shetland, the Western Isles and Moray might go to level 1. Less positively, we believe that the escalating situation in Dundee City makes it possible that it will go to level 3. As has been reported, we are considering whether the very high rate of transmission and hospital admissions in North and South Lanarkshire may necessitate a move for them to level 4. Those are the only areas that are currently being considered for level 4. There have, however, been some encouraging signs in the past few days that the situation in Lanarkshire may have stabilised slightly, so we will take that decision only if it is deemed absolutely necessary and I hope that we can avoid it. I hope to confirm those decisions to the Parliament ahead of First Minister's questions on Thursday.

For all of Scotland, our aim is to get to level 1 and then to level 0 of the framework as quickly as possible. We know that that is possible because, over the summer, we got to the very low levels of transmission that would be needed for that. If we can do it once, we can do it again, but it will not be easy. It will take action from the Government to support the wider efforts. That is why our strategic approach does not simply set out restrictions, it also explains how we will expand testing and the

steps that we will take to better support people to comply with the rules, especially on self isolation. We set out the details of our testing expansion in the paper that we published last week.

Finally, we know that while Government has the responsibility to lead, success against the virus will depend on us all. It is difficult and frustrating and it is getting more so by the day, especially as we head towards Christmas. However, if we dig in now and get Covid under more control, we perhaps open the door, not to 100 per cent normality by Christmas, but I hope to more than we have right now. We all want to see that. So please: I am asking people to stick with it. As of Monday, make sure that you check what restrictions apply in your area. Please stay out of other people's houses, except for the limited reasons that are allowed. Follow the rules on face coverings, avoid crowded places, clean your hands, keep 2m distancing and, if you have symptoms, self-isolate and get a test.

All of us must try to be as patient as possible about not being able to go to the football or for a pint or out for a meal with friends. Those are hard sacrifices, but they will protect you and your loved ones, they will help to protect the national health service and they will save lives. Right now, that is what we must all pull together to seek to do.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the publication of *COVID-19: Scotland's Strategic Framework*, which sets out the intended approach to managing the suppression of COVID-19 across Scotland in the coming months; further notes that local NHS boards and local authorities will be consulted on the application of the framework to individual areas; acknowledges the basket of measures that will be considered with data published on decisions; further acknowledges that the Framework takes account of the direct harm that COVID-19 causes as well as the health, social and economic harms that result from the pandemic and the protective measures that have to be put in place; notes the increased support for self-isolation and compliance, the continued support for communities and for individuals, including for mental health, the projected increase in testing capacity and the commitment to increasing routine asymptomatic testing, as well as a commitment to continue to build and enhance the Test and Protect system; further notes the commitment to keeping schools open at all levels and the economic package put in place to support those businesses that may be required to close or have their operations restricted, and calls on the UK Government to enable the Scottish Government to make the same open-ended commitment to funding businesses in Scotland as has been made in England and to improve the support for wages, particularly for low-income workers who may be hardest hit by any necessary restrictions, in order to support people and businesses to comply.

16:05

**Ruth Davidson (Edinburgh Central) (Con):** We are where we did not want to be: in the midst of a second wave, with hospital wards filling up

and shops and businesses forced to close, with many worried that they will never reopen. We have no date for a vaccine, and there is an increasing realisation that a start-stop approach to shutting down society might buy time and space, but it is not in itself a solution.

Therefore, Governments across these islands are now adopting a tiered system of response to see us through the winter and into the new year, with national, regional and local variations. The idea, once again, is to suppress the virus, cut infection and reduce pressure on our NHS.

I join the First Minister in thanking—as she always does—the doctors, nurses, clinicians and staff who are now steeling themselves for the weeks and months ahead. Today's position is a chastening one, but we have a few elements in our favour. We have a public that wants to help and will do its bit if the instructions are clear and the reasoning sound. We have more information and data. We have more examples of good practice from around the world to inform our decision making. There is also, I believe, a political will that transcends party colours to see us through this challenge.

On launching the framework, the First Minister said that she sought suggestions for areas that could be improved, questions to be considered and concerns to be raised. I take her at her word, and the Conservative Party amendment is designed to build and improve on the proposals that are on the table.

Let us start with where we are in full agreement and alignment with the Scottish Government. First, there is the need to recognise the importance of local authorities and health boards in this process, to make sure that the people who are delivering on the ground have the earliest possible input on what they are being asked to enact. There is also the priority of keeping the schools open. The First Minister will know that the Conservatives have been unwavering in our recognition of the importance of the physical opening of and attendance at schools. When plans for blended learning for half days and parts of weeks were being advanced, we were clear that our young people had been damaged enough through the pandemic and that keeping the learning, social contact and structure of school was an imperative. The framework recognises that.

In changes to the First Minister's proposals of last week, she confirms that informal childcare, which was to be allowed only at tiers 0 and 1, will now be extended to include tiers 2 and 3. That change is welcome. So, too, is the announcement of a postcode checker that will allow people to check which restrictions apply to them.

Where we are disappointed is in the late change to today's motion to take a swipe at the United Kingdom Government, making no recognition of the £7.2 billion in additional funding for Scotland during the pandemic, including £700 million of support that was announced at the start of October.

Notwithstanding that, the Scottish Conservatives will give their support to the motion, and we ask for support for our amendment as we believe that it tackles some vital areas that are in the interest of all Scots as we move through the next phase of managing the pandemic.

Alongside protecting public health, the most crucial issue is the protection of people's jobs, livelihoods and standards of living. The past six months have been horrendous for small businesses across Scotland—probably the hardest they have ever faced, even considering the years following the financial crash of 2008. We are not talking about big multinationals but about family-owned firms that are fighting to maintain local jobs in their areas. They are contending with what might be necessary restrictions, but they have no part to play in the process of drawing them up. They need to be on the inside, helping to mould a framework of regulation that supports firms and jobs, rather than being simply the recipients of restrictions that are handed down by ministers. Will the Scottish Government consider establishing a formal coronavirus business advisory council to help advise on the practical needs of businesses during this time of enhanced restrictions and properly inform the decisions that are taken?

**The First Minister:** I thank Ruth Davidson for the constructive tone of her contribution so far. It may be the case that we cannot support all the amendments in the vote tonight, because they remove parts of our motion that we think are important, but I want to make clear that that does not mean that we are not of the view that there are important suggestions in each of the amendments, including the one that Ruth Davidson has just spoken about.

We will take all the suggestions from all the amendments and try to take them forward as much and as far as we possibly can. I want to put that commitment on the record in relation to her specific point, and more generally as well.

**Ruth Davidson:** I thank the First Minister for saying that she will take that suggestion on board. I will explain why I think it is so important and why I want to press her to look positively on it. Just last week, business organisations were given two to three days to respond to the Government's framework before today's debate. Many spoke about the need to be in the room when those plans were being drawn up in the first place, and

about using their experience to inform the thinking behind the plans. Throughout the pandemic, representative bodies such as the Federation of Small Businesses, Scottish Chambers of Commerce and the Scottish Retail Consortium have made it clear that they want to play a constructive role. The creation of an advisory council would benefit the Government; it would benefit those on the ground who are doing their utmost to adapt and change and keep their workers and customers safe; and it would benefit us all by keeping more businesses afloat and more people in work. I am therefore pleased that the Government will give consideration to such a body.

It is important to bring businesses into the decision-making process because it would help to answer the questions that they have now. I know that Fiona Hyslop received submissions last night asking legitimate questions about how the framework was going to work. How will areas move in and out of each level and under what criteria? What is the minimum period for staying in the levels? A two-week to four-week spread will simply not work. What advance warning will businesses get before being told that they have to enter or move tiers? What target criteria need to be met for areas to move from a higher level to a lower one?

Those businesses also asked, as the Conservatives have repeatedly asked, for airport testing, and they rightly demand the clarity that so far has been missing. For example, firms across the central belt were told to cut or close for a two-week circuit break that was due to end on 26 October. They were then told that that would be extended by a week. They are now being told that they are about to enter tier 3, with no date of exit. The decisions that firms make about a two-week suspension of business are not the same as the decisions that they would make for indefinite closure, and it is simply not fair of the Government to string them along and not give them that information. They rightly ask why cases, hospitalisation and transmission rates, can be so wildly different between, for example, Edinburgh and Glasgow and yet both cities face the same restrictions. Businesses need clarity about the tier system that we are moving to, and they need clear communication and advance warning.

That is also true of our councils. I understand that council leaders spoke to the Deputy First Minister yesterday and they were advised that there will be movement within tiers, or sub-tiers, so an area could be level 1 with some level 2 restrictions that would essentially make it level 1+. The obvious consequence of that would be more gradations and combinations of restrictions than the five that have been set out. Key to retaining the public's trust and compliance—

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Ruth Davidson:** Absolutely. I seek clarity on that point.

**John Swinney:** Whatever has been conveyed to Ms Davidson is not the position. We have been clear that, subject to the modifications that the First Minister has made today, the basis of the levels as set out will be what we commence our arrangements to include. There might be stages at which we can apply different constraints within different local authorities, but that will not happen at the starting point. That is the point that the First Minister made about, for example, the Argyll islands compared to the mainland of Argyll.

**Ruth Davidson:** That clarity is hugely welcome, but it demonstrates some of the difficulties that we have already seen in the process before these tiers are brought in. In our amendment is a request for provision and publication of more local and regional data. That is one way in which we can help to improve clarity within local authority areas and between local authorities.

Another of our key asks is for thought to be given now to what can be done for people around Christmas. The Government motion rightly mentions mental health. The Samaritans say that they take 300,000 calls across the UK on Christmas day in the average year, and this year is not even close to being average. Research published this month by the Campaign to End Loneliness shows that nearly two thirds of adults are worried that they will not be able to see family and friends this Christmas because of the coronavirus. More than a quarter are worried about being alone on Christmas day and more than half say that they will not see elderly relatives because they are afraid of endangering them, although they know that that will also increase their loneliness. On Sunday, the Deputy First Minister indicated that he was in discussions with the UK Government and other devolved Administrations to develop a plan to allow students to return home for Christmas.

Notwithstanding his remarks yesterday, that is to be welcomed and it would be helpful if we could get more detail on those discussions and receive regular updates on their progress to ensure that students—many away from home for the first time—can return to their families safely for the Christmas break.

However, that is not enough. We need to look at the viability of a plan to allow a temporary and proportionate moderation of household restrictions that will lift the threat of loneliness and isolation hanging over so many people as they look ahead. The five tier framework allows for limited degrees

of in-home socialising at levels 0 and 1, but no in-home socialising at all across levels 2 to 4. Safety is of paramount importance along with the need to suppress the virus, but will the First Minister commit today to examining the case, in conjunction with her medical and scientific advisers, for allowing a limited degree of in-home socialising across at least the first four tiers over Christmas day and Boxing day? Even a limited moderation across those 48 hours would help to ensure that parents could see children and, perhaps more importantly, grandparents could see grandchildren, this Christmas.

Counterintuitively, there may be a public health benefit to that. If we want people to continue to work within the rules in the long term, they should not be faced with a choice where family needs override their buy-in to compliance. We know that once that Rubicon of knowingly and purposefully casting the rules aside is crossed, keeping adherence in all other respects becomes harder.

I know that no limited moderation can provide a full solution. The hard truth is that it is impossible for every seat that is normally taken at the family table to be filled this Christmas, but nobody should have to sit alone.

**Elaine Smith:** Does the member agree with Bishop John Keenan who said about Christmas that it is important to give people hope?

**Ruth Davidson:** It is absolutely important to give people hope. It is also important to keep people safe. Those are very difficult questions. I understand the complexity and difficulty. That is why we are not calling for a plan to be announced today; we are asking the Government to take the idea away to look at its viability and at what can be done in those areas. We need a plan for Christmas that, although showing that things will not be normal, still brings the opportunity for families to come together to see and love each other and to support those who would otherwise be condemned to a very bleak December.

The way in which families are structured and the divide that distance has created and entrenched this year, means that any Christmas loneliness strategy should be co-ordinated as much as possible among the four home nations.

We have approached today in a constructive manner and we believe that our proposals for a coronavirus business advisory council, local and regional data collection, advance warning for sectors about proposed tier changes, target data for tier reduction and a Christmas loneliness strategy will help Scotland come through the second wave in better shape. We urge the Scottish Government to consider those proposals.

I move amendment S5M-23133.4, to leave out from “, and calls on” to end and insert:

“; calls on the Scottish Government to establish a Coronavirus Business Restrictions Advisory Council to support Scottish jobs as well as protect public health; recognises the important role of NHS boards and local authorities in controlling this virus; calls for the further development and publication of local and regional data and statistics relating to COVID-19 and partnership working with local authorities to respond to local circumstances and Scotland's diverse communities; further calls on the Scottish Government to develop and publish a Christmas loneliness strategy to consider the need for families to safely meet relatives across the UK this festive season, and calls on the Scottish Government to continue to work closely with the UK Government and the other devolved administrations in suppressing COVID-19.”

16:17

**Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab):** Over the past week, the Government has been trying to build cross-party consensus for the framework. Those of us who have had friends, neighbours and family members struck down by the virus, those who have been hospitalised and will suffer the long-term effects and those who know others who did not make it, know just how serious the situation is—we do not need to be reminded.

We agree that we should strive for a consensus. However, our first duty is collectively to get it right. We need to get it right for Scotland because people are suffering. Businesses are suffering and communities are suffering. Scotland has already paid a price. That is why it remains our firm view that members of the Scottish Parliament need to be able to ask questions of Government ministers, in the Parliament, about the framework, in advance of voting on it.

A week ago, that was the agreed position. Days ago, that was withdrawn, in what was clearly a political decision. That begs the question for many people: what does the Government have to hide? A simple parliamentary debate on the motion is not sufficient. It does not give us the level of parliamentary scrutiny that the people who sent us here rightly expect. Private briefings with Opposition party leaders have their place, but they cannot be a substitute for public and parliamentary debate, scrutiny and interrogation. That is our view.

**The First Minister:** I appreciate the point that Richard Leonard makes, but I do not think that I can be fairly criticised for shying away from questions. I have given umpteen statements, and answered probably hundreds of questions, in the Parliament, and I will be back in the chamber on Thursday for the weekly First Minister's questions.

The view was taken that this was the right time to have a lengthy parliamentary debate with a vote at the end; we do not have a vote at the end of a statement. I will come to Parliament as often as necessary, and as often as is wanted, and I will

stay here for as long as possible, to answer questions. I have made that clear.

I will no doubt be corrected if I am wrong on this, but I have probably answered more questions than any leader of any Government anywhere else in the world. I am happy to continue to do so, because that is my responsibility.

**Richard Leonard:** I thank the First Minister for that intervention, but—as a matter of record—we were looking for a statement by the First Minister today, so that she could be questioned, and then a parliamentary debate tomorrow. We were looking for both those things, not one or the other.

It is a step forward if the Government is now conceding the principle that regulations should be voted on by Parliament before and not after they take effect, but we still need the opportunity to test those regulations and the evidence that lies behind them. Any motion, legislation or regulations passed by the Parliament must reflect that.

We have always said that the gloom of the pandemic must be illuminated by the light of scientific reason, and that means evidence—credible, persuasive and reliable evidence that people can see and understand. We need much greater transparency around the indicators that are being used to determine which tier a local population is being placed in.

**The First Minister:** The member will see in the technical paper that we published today the data that will be used in the thresholds and how the decision-making process will work. As I said when I intervened on Ruth Davidson, I remind members that most of the data and evidence that we have is already published. Anybody can go to the Public Health Scotland website and look at the daily data for their own neighbourhood.

As I said to Richard Leonard when we met last week, I understand the call for evidence, but some of the additional evidence that has been asked for simply does not yet exist in Scotland or in any other country. We already publish most of the data that is available to us, and we will continue to do so at as granular a level as possible.

**Richard Leonard:** We think that clear thresholds should be set out and published weekly so that people can understand which tier they are in and why. We think that clear indicators, such as the level of cases in care homes, and the rate of cases among those aged over 60 in a local authority area, should be published routinely.

I have heard the First Minister say on numerous occasions that the evidence that we are looking for does not exist, but it must be possible to distinguish between the rates of transmission in restaurants, pubs, bars and cafes. Otherwise, how could decisions such as the one that was made in



Aberdeen be taken from an informed point of view? That is what business owners and hospitality owners alike were telling me a week ago in Glasgow's Merchant City. They want better-informed, evidence-led interventions so that at least some parts of the night-time economy might be kept open in our towns and cities.

I am bound to say that it must be possible to do better than the response of the First Minister in her daily briefings, which has been to say that if there is a thin line between a cafe and a restaurant, all cafes will be shut down. That is not a rational response by a Government that is supposed to be winning public consent at a time of enormous sacrifice. The First Minister must understand why there is such anger in Scotland's hospitality industry.

On Friday, the First Minister said that we were not back at square 1. It is true that schools, for example, are to remain open, and we welcome that. However, although we may not be back at square 1, a second wave is coming as we approach the winter. That is very different from the challenge that we faced as we went into the spring and early summer. We know that emergency hospital admissions in December last year were more than 9 per cent higher than they were in April last year. The challenge that we face is different, and it is greater.

In our amendment to the Government motion, we reflect on the fact that the Government has been too slow at testing, at turnaround times for testing and at turnaround times for contact tracing under test and protect. The expansion of testing capacity is no good on its own if the turnaround time for results is too slow.

Turning to students, those who have come to Scotland's universities should have been tested on arrival at least once. Now they should be tested before the Christmas break and on return from the Christmas break, so that they can safely have a Christmas break. Families want to be together at Christmas. The people of Scotland have already paid a price, so everything needs to be done to ensure that that can happen, and we will work with the Government to ensure that it does.

We welcome the extension of testing, but it, too, has been too slow. We have been calling for the extension of routine testing to home care workers for months. The Government has finally agreed, but we still do not know when we can expect that to take place. Those workers, who are predominantly women workers, are putting themselves at risk to care for Scotland's most vulnerable people, so everything needs to be done to ensure that we are caring for and protecting them. They need a date for testing.

Like the lockdown of hospitality and like last week's extension to that lockdown of hospitality, the new framework that comes into force in six days' time has not won unquestioning support in the country, so it does not win unquestioning support from Labour. People understand that the choices are stark but, in a democracy, they can be made only with the establishment of trust and the winning of public consent by persuasion, rather than coercion. The rising public hesitancy that the Government is now facing is in part born out of a fatigue or tiredness in the desperate search for light at the end of the tunnel, but it is also born out of a growing restlessness and discontent that yet more is being asked without the compelling and persuasive evidence that is needed to back it up.

The evidence must be central to the winning of public consent, because the selfless sacrifice of the people has been unlimited, and the emotional strength, the effort and the endeavour especially of key workers, who have worked on for month after month with no break, has been heroic.

Many working people are now facing the grim prospect of unemployment and joblessness in the lead-up to Christmas, and that is why they want a Government and a Parliament that are on their side. It is essential that they do not become the victims of a struggle between two Governments—we want the two Governments to co-operate, not compete, in the interests of public health and of people's jobs. We agree that the Tory Government should increase and extend support for businesses and workers in Scotland, but the Scottish National Party Government, too, needs to be bolder.

It feels like the framework will be with us for some time: that is why it is so important that we get it right, and that is why we need people to be able to support it—not out of fear of the repercussions of not doing so but out of a belief that sticking to it will help us all. That is the test for the Scottish Government, and it is a test for us, as representatives of the people. In the end, this is a test of democracy.

I move amendment S5M-23133.2, to leave out from "further notes that local NHS boards" to end and insert:

"welcomes measures to control the spread of the virus but calls for greater transparency in the decision making over when different levels will be imposed; calls for clarity on the full range of indicators that will be considered and believes that these should also include the rate of positive cases by area, rate of cases in individuals aged over 60 and the level of cases in care homes; considers that each level should have clear thresholds set out within these indicators and that data for each of the relevant indicators should be published at least weekly to ensure public and parliamentary confidence; calls for the Parliament to be allowed the opportunity to fully scrutinise these decisions; further calls for the extension of routine testing for vulnerable people and people working on the frontline, as

well as asymptomatic testing for key groups, including testing for students before they can safely return home for Christmas and then again when they go back to university after the holidays; further calls for improvements to the Test and Protect system to ensure quicker turnaround times for contact tracing; notes the Scottish Government's commitment to keeping schools open at all levels and calls for greater communications and support for families when COVID-19 cases are confirmed within a school; further calls for greater support for people self-isolating, including financial and mental health support, and further calls on the Scottish and UK governments to work together to put in place greater economic support for wages and for businesses that may be required to close or have their operations restricted, in order to support people and businesses to comply."

16:28

**Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green):** It is vital that the Scottish Government's strategy to tackle Covid-19 is properly scrutinised by Parliament and that we have the opportunity to work towards political consensus.

As our amendment states, the Greens believe that the ultimate goal should be "elimination" of the virus. The Scottish Government's framework states that the strategic intent is

"to suppress the virus to the lowest possible level and keep it there, while we strive to return to a more normal life for as many people as possible."

People worked hard to suppress the virus over the summer, but it has subsequently escalated out of control. We have to learn; we need to understand why. We also need the opportunity to scrutinise and debate the Government's response on an on-going basis. We cannot to continue to lurch from one lockdown to another until an effective vaccine becomes available.

**Elaine Smith:** I note what Alison Johnstone said. I therefore wonder whether she might be able to tell me why the Green Party did not support the idea of having a statement with questions today, followed by a debate with a vote tomorrow, in order to have better scrutiny this week of the framework and what has gone before during the past 16 days.

**Alison Johnstone:** I am comfortable with the Green Party's scrutiny in relation to the pandemic.

As my amendment says, routine asymptomatic testing will be an important tool in an elimination strategy. We know that those who are carrying Covid-19 can be asymptomatic while contagious and we cannot continue to wait for people to show symptoms before we test them. The framework refers to an expansion of asymptomatic testing to certain groups, but we need to go further and faster.

For example, the framework limits ambition for asymptomatic testing in universities—it will be used only in response to an outbreak, but the

damage will have been done by then. Universities in England are increasingly developing their own testing capacity, using innovative techniques to routinely test as many staff and students as they can. As part of its screening programme, the University of Cambridge can now test up to 16,000 people per week. I therefore call on the Scottish Government to work with Scottish universities to let that happen here as soon as possible. We must not forget that the return of students to universities in September helped to propel us into the second wave and caused misery to thousands of students who are confined to overcrowded halls. We cannot let that happen again.

**Neil Findlay:** I am interested in the number that the member gave when she spoke about a university testing 16,000 people a week. In Scotland, we are still not testing home care workers every week, which is absolutely appalling, and NHS staff, who are on the front line, are still not being tested every week. That is the reality, and that is why we require more scrutiny than we have at the moment.

**Alison Johnstone:** I agree whole-heartedly with Mr Findlay. In April, I presented the Government with a paper that called for asymptomatic testing and outlined research from Imperial College London, which showed that such testing could help reduce transmission of the virus by up to a third. The fact that the framework speaks of the introduction of the testing of community nurses is shocking; a lot of people will be surprised to learn that such testing is not happening as a matter of course.

Asymptomatic testing has not yet been delivered at the required scale and speed, despite clear evidence of its importance in detecting the virus, breaking chains of infection and saving lives. The framework states:

"Testing, on its own, does not reduce transmission".

I am sure that every person in this chamber understands that, but we have to look at the research that has been done.

As my amendment states,

"a coherent response to the ongoing pandemic requires effort to build political consensus",

and it is vital that we are properly enabled to examine and debate the Government's approach. We are in the privileged position of representing the people of Scotland, so we have to understand the Government's intention in introducing specific restrictions and the scientific advice that underpins them. Therefore, I will continue to call for every opportunity to allow Opposition parties to do that.

Every opportunity should also be taken to share information with wider civic society, which is essential in ensuring on-going public support when

new measures that are intended to curb the spread of Covid are introduced. It is entirely reasonable for people to want to know why they are being asked to do certain things, and, with people expressing anxiety when restrictions were being lifted, the sharing of information also provides confidence.

Like many others in the chamber, I have received correspondence from constituents who are confused about the science that underpins certain measures; they give an example of one measure and compare it with another. Therefore, clarity of messaging is key.

I understand that there is a tension between maintaining a flexible approach, which enables the Scottish Government and partners to respond quickly to emergency situations, and delivering clarity. Although it would be neither fair nor productive to impose strict measures on areas where there is a low number of cases, imposing different levels of restrictions on different parts of the country might cause confusion. I think that the First Minister appreciates that challenge, so I would appreciate it if, in closing, the First Minister or the cabinet secretary could outline the form that the new marketing campaigns that have been mentioned will take.

As we know—and I will begin to close, Presiding Officer—the virus affects different communities differently. People in our most deprived communities are more than twice as likely to die with Covid than those who live in the least deprived areas. I am pleased that the framework contains a commitment to work with minority ethnic communities and organisations to ensure that the Scottish Government gets its messaging right, but I would also appreciate more detail in that regard.

The public needs to know that we have an effective exit strategy, that we are striving to eliminate the virus in Scotland, and that robust scientific evidence underpins the approach. Increased and meaningful public dialogue, the expansion of asymptomatic testing and on-going debate in the Parliament will go some way towards achieving that, so I ask members to support my amendment.

I move amendment S5M-23133.3, to insert at end:

“; believes that the ultimate goal must be elimination of COVID-19; recognises that the expansion of asymptomatic testing will play an important role in this endeavour, including in higher and further education settings, and considers that a coherent response to the ongoing pandemic requires effort to build political consensus, and that, in addition to formal parliamentary scrutiny, this must include greater sharing of the Scottish Government’s scientific advice with opposition parties and civil society, opportunities for discussion of all policy options under consideration rather than only finalised proposals, and

proactive efforts to identify known challenges ahead as well as responding to events as they happen.”

16:35

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** We have worked constructively during the pandemic and will continue to do so.

The good news is that the Government now seems to accept much wider use of asymptomatic testing. The 80 per cent of those who have the virus but who have no symptoms can now self-isolate with a positive test. That is a major change. I believe that that benefit outweighs any negative behaviours that may come from a negative test.

If we had accepted that principle earlier, we might today have been able to snuff out any outbreaks before they spread in our communities, and we might have been able to avoid the imposition of the generic, crude restrictions that we are talking about.

I know that the First Minister disagrees, but over the summer the Government got carried away with talk of elimination, and it missed the opportunity to get ready for the widely predicted second wave by having more testing and by improving capacity for tracing and quarantine spot checks.

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman):** Will the member accept that the Government was not “carried away”, that what was said about what was achieved by the Scottish public as we reached the summer was entirely accurate and that we did not waste time?

Mr Rennie knows that we are able now to look at wider cohorts of asymptomatic testing because we have built up NHS Scotland’s testing capacity. That, along with what the UK Government can manage with the Lighthouse labs, will allow us, as we enter winter, to have headroom in capacity and to introduce more cohorts into asymptomatic testing.

Notwithstanding that we continue to disagree, it is entirely wrong to say that the Government was either complacent or foolish in what we said and did over the summer months.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** I ask that interventions be kept a bit shorter, please.

**Willie Rennie:** I am sorry to disagree with the health secretary. I do not think that she was foolish; I think that the Government had an ideological objection to asymptomatic testing, because it believed that the negative behaviours that would come from that would not be of benefit. It has now evolved and changed its position, and it accepts wider asymptomatic testing. I think that that is a good thing, but I wish that it had happened earlier, because we might have been in

a better position today; we might have had that testing and been able to snuff out the virus in our communities. The Government had that objection, rather than building up capacity.

There has been much chopping and changing in recent weeks, so we need some stability with the restrictions. I want greater involvement of the Parliament in approving the big changes to the levels. I support the idea of various committees of the Parliament approving regulations in advance of any change. I also support the idea of debates in the chamber on any substantial changes, such as whether schools should move to blended learning, whether there should be widespread travel restrictions, or whether every council should be moved up to level three or four. I hope that the cabinet secretary, in her summing up, can respond positively to that proposal.

The Liberal Democrat amendment, which I will move, seeks fairness, hope and clarity.

I am pleased at the detail that has been provided in the documentation over the weekend and today on the data, on the criteria and on the thresholds. We asked for that, and I am pleased that it has been forthcoming.

However, there are issues of clarity. For example, on local flexibility, we have 32 councils, but, as has been indicated this afternoon, there is a possibility of including some areas within councils, such as the Argyll islands. There is huge potential variation across the country.

Then there is the issue of flexibility of the levels. There are not just five levels: we learned today that there is, in effect, a level 1.5, with the possibility of maintaining a ban on indoor meetings in the Highlands and Islands. There are therefore five-plus levels—and the two to four-week periods in which measures may be introduced. There is the potential for different parts of the country to bob in and out of different levels at different times, for different periods. It will take a huge effort to communicate the position. Such flexibility might enable the Government to target areas with the necessary measures with greater precision, but the job of communication has just got much harder. We are talking about 32 local authorities, five and a half levels, different places and different times. It will be a real challenge to get the message across. I will assist in making that happen, but I hope that the Government is on top of the issue, because the situation is going to get an awful lot more complicated.

There is level 0, but there appears to be no route to get there. In the documentation that has been provided over the past few days, we see that there are councils that have a zero under various indicators. However, that takes them only to level 1. How are such areas to get to level 0? Is that

possible? We need clarity and we need to give people hope that there is a route to the best-case scenario—which is still pretty restrictive. Are we to have indicators of minus 1? Is there such a thing? What do councils need to do to get to level 0?

A much more fundamental point is that we need to debate the longer-term goal. Of course we hope for a vaccine and that we can suppress the virus until we have that, but we need to consider that that might take longer and might not be possible. We know about the various competing health, societal and economic harms—we understand about that. We can cope with those harms for a short period, but if they are to go on for much longer, their burden will become much greater. That, I think, will tilt the balance and change things. Therefore, we need to consider whether it is possible to continue with restrictions at their current levels.

Hospitality is expected to bear the brunt of some of the changes. The construction and manufacturing sectors made changes and are now able to operate safely, under all circumstances and at all levels of transmission. The same is expected of schools and hospitals. If that is possible for those sectors, why cannot it be possible for hospitality, tourism and the entertainment sectors? When the—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You need to move things along, please.

**Willie Rennie:** I will do, Presiding Officer. When the 2 Sisters Food Group chicken factory in Coupar Angus was hit by an outbreak, there was no decision to close every chicken plant in the country. Why cannot we take a targeted approach to hospitality businesses that comply with the rules?

I am not proposing specific measures; I want us to come up with a plan for the future, because people need to have hope that it is possible to get there. This is going to be a long, long winter, and we need a long-term strategy.

I move amendment S5M- 23133.1, to insert at end:

“; believes that additional capacity is urgently needed within Test and Protect, in light of the low level of quarantine spot-checks and long waits for interviews by contact tracers, alongside the extra demand that will be generated by the new routine asymptomatic testing required to protect groups, including students, and calls on the Scottish Government to provide communities with fairness, clarity and hope by sharing the criteria and thresholds for their moving up and down between the levels of restrictions, and the data that will underpin these decisions.”

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to the open debate. Can we have speeches of up to six minutes, please?

16:43

**Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP):**

We are all living through really difficult times. We have lost friends, family members and members of the communities that we represent to the virus. It is with all those people very much in my mind and heart that I speak today.

We face a global pandemic of a nasty virus that represents a serious risk to life. Scotland is not alone in facing the virus. The decisions that the Scottish Government is taking might not be palatable and they are not being taken lightly; they are about trying to protect health and life in the most proportionate way possible. Where there is serious risk to life, serious and sometimes difficult action is required. Scotland is not unique in that regard.

The new strategic framework that we are debating today sets out the work that is required to suppress the virus, which is based on clinical evidence, expert advice and a balanced assessment of the risks. I welcome the approach that the First Minister and her Government have taken in being open, providing honest reflections of the decisions that need to be made and acknowledging that it is required that a balance be struck between the four harms that we know the virus causes. None of this is easy.

As we seek to tackle the direct and very real harm to health and life that is caused by Covid, it is crucial that we recognise the wider health harms that will result if our NHS is overwhelmed by Covid, the social harms that are caused by lockdown restrictions such as increased isolation and inequality, and the economic harm that is suffered by business and workers across the country, which in turn causes physical and mental health problems. None of those issues can be viewed in isolation.

We must strike the best balances that we can in the interests of minimising the overall harm that the pandemic is causing. It is very important that we remind ourselves that if we allow the virus to run out of control, all the other harms will be exacerbated. That is why everything that we do must be consistent with suppressing Covid as far as possible. The five levels of protective measures are helpful in that they allow a national approach to be taken if required, while also providing the opportunity for local flexibility, which can ensure that restrictions are not placed on people unnecessarily. That last point is important.

I know about the personal toll that Covid is taking on people. If we are among the lucky ones, we are simply missing family and friends whom we cannot see, and the activities that we used to take part in. Others are carrying even greater burdens, and are worried about their long-term health, their

families and how they will cope with caring responsibilities if they fall sick. They are worried about their jobs, making ends meet or putting food on the table for their children.

We know that people who are already facing inequality are most likely to be negatively affected by Covid-19, with an increased risk of them facing financial and physical insecurity. For example, women are affected in terms of their health—not only as front-line workers and carers, but because of the policies that have been introduced to manage the impact of the virus. Periods of isolation and social distancing can exacerbate women's experiences of domestic abuse by, in effect, trapping them in unsafe situations, with limited access to vital support and means of escape.

Inclusion Scotland tells us that on top of years of exclusion and austerity, disabled people have been dealt a triple whammy: the virus, lack of control and lack of support. They need that control and support to enable them to endure the pandemic and whatever comes after it. I note Inclusion Scotland's point about disabled people being able to self-shield, because they are the experts on their own conditions. I ask the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport to comment on that when she sums up.

Earlier in the year, I amended coronavirus legislation to place a requirement on the Government to

“have regard to opportunities to advance equality”.

Even during a public health emergency, current policies should have equality and human rights at their centre. Although I acknowledge how challenging being asked to advance equality is at this time, we have some examples of where that has been possible. I urge the Scottish Government to continue to fully utilise equality impact assessments in order to find ways of advancing equality, and not merely to highlight issues that people are facing.

We hear phrases such as “unprecedented times” so much that we have probably become a bit inured to them, but it is the truth that for many of us Covid poses the greatest challenge that we face as a nation. To succeed—to get through this—we need everyone's help and adherence. We need continued collective care, courage and resolve to do our part, so that our communities, our health and care services, and our economy can be best protected.

By following the measures and playing our individual parts, and by taking care of ourselves and looking out for each other, this will pass and a better future can lie ahead.

16:48

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** Governments the world over are having to make decisions that nobody would ever want to have to make. That is why, all those months ago, the Scottish Conservatives put party politics aside and lent our support to the Scottish Government's efforts to tackle the Covid-19 threat. That remains our position, and it remains the right thing to do.

However, to help to maintain that unified approach, it is important that communication between the Scottish Government and Parliament remains as open as possible. We acknowledged that, in navigating the pandemic, mistakes were bound to be made. That has never been an issue. The issue, however, has been that the Scottish Government has been less than forthcoming with evidence and opportunities to properly scrutinise and input into the decisions that have been made. Furthermore, to date, the Government's response to other parties' inputs and suggestions has been frustrating, to say the least.

We are now eight months into the Covid crisis, but there is little sign of it abating any time soon. I say quite frankly that I am sure that the expectation of the Scottish Government—and of many of us in the chamber—was that the worst would be over and the virus would be under control by now. The reason why I say that is that the Government's approach continues to be predominantly reactive, and without an overall framework and direction that the Scottish public can work to. Most important is that there has been little discussion on a strategy for our exit from the pandemic.

There is a balancing act between the two needs to protect the public from the virus itself and to protect them from the impact of the restrictions. As well as the obvious economic pain, significant physical and mental health issues definitely arise from the imposition of Covid restrictions. As has been mentioned already in the context of mental health, Christmas is now looming large in the public consciousness. There are rising concerns about the impact of loneliness and people being away from their loved ones—some of whom have not had the chance to see one another since March. What are the chances of the public adhering en masse to being asked to stay away from their loved ones? They need hope, and to see a ray of light at the end of a long, dark tunnel.

**The First Minister:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Brian Whittle:** Of course.

**The First Minister:** I thank Brian Whittle, both for his contribution and for giving way.

Everybody wants to see their family at Christmas—I desperately want to see mine. We will plan as well as we can, but we cannot absolutely foresee the future for the virus.

However, does Brian Whittle agree that the best way to try to open the door to as much normality as possible at Christmas is for all of us to dig in right now, and to abide by all the advice in order to get the virus to levels that are low enough for us to do that? It would be good for all of us to continue to come together behind that message, as members are already doing.

**Brian Whittle:** I absolutely agree with the First Minister that, across the whole country, we need to adhere to the strategy. However, one of the issues here is that it has bounced about a bit, so it is becoming more difficult for people to understand what it now is.

Scottish Conservatives have asked for the development of a Christmas strategy to be considered. We do not know what that might be, but we would like the idea to be considered, because hope is in short supply at the moment.

I will move on. I want to put forward the case for the voice of business to be heard when decisions on restrictions are being made, so that we protect as many jobs as can safely be protected. That echoes the Scottish Conservatives' amendment.

Many businesses that traditionally work to a one-year, three-year or five-year plan currently cannot plan even a week in advance. Continually opening up and shutting down is unworkable. Business is not a tap that can be turned on and off; it might be easy to shut it down, but it takes time to turn the tap back on.

Businesses were asked to innovate and to find ways of operating in a Covid-safe environment in order to safeguard as many jobs as possible. They rose to that challenge, but then the rules changed and all the investment and innovation were lost. Many businesses have demonstrated their ability to operate safely, but they believe that they are being penalised, instead of those who flouted the rules. They say that we should not punish those who fully comply with the rules because of the stupidity of those who do not. Instead, we should seek out those who break the rules.

For example, the problems in the hospitality industry have been well documented. To understand the extent of the problem we have only to drive through a city such as Glasgow to see the rise in the number of "To let" signs, where restaurants or cafes were trading only recently.

However, it is not just the hospitality industry that is suffering; the whole food supply chain is under threat. On Friday, I spoke to a major wholesaler who, to use his words, is

“haemorrhaging money”, to the extent that he is considering shedding 70 staff because he does not know what is coming down the line. He has only a fraction of his delivery trucks out there, and they are running half empty, while trying to maintain supplies for his customers who are still able to carry out some trading.

One member of my local chamber of commerce has said that most businesses will not be on the list of those that are mandated to close, but they are expected to remain open under some restrictions. However, the overwhelming mood music from the Government is that customers are being asked to stay away. The Government needs to speak to the Scottish Wholesale Association, which will tell it the stark reality of the cliff edge that it faces, in a sector that is worth £2.9 billion to Scotland and supplies some 5,000 convenience stores, as well as hospitals, schools, prisons and hospitality businesses. Wholesalers have high overheads and carry significant stock, but have been left out of the support schemes such as that which provides rates relief.

If supply chains fail, they will be extremely difficult to rebuild. There will be a post-Covid period, so business needs to know that preparations and plans are being made to which they can work; they need to know that there is light at the end of the tunnel so that they can be confident about retaining their employees. Scottish Chambers of Commerce has said that if there is to be

“Hope and confidence in the data and evidence being collated and analysed by the Government, it needs to be open, detailed and regularly reported and communicated.”

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Come to a close, please.

**Brian Whittle:** That will be critical to regaining trust that there is still an ambitious and innovative strategy being applied to guide us through the crisis.

We need to protect lives and livelihoods—it does not need to be either/or. Eight months in, our response should be more sophisticated. It is time to take a breath and to let those who are most affected by restrictions have their say.

16:55

**Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP):** As an English Scot, I put on record my anger and disgust about comments made by Willie Rennie at the weekend. His appalling attempt to bring naked constitutional politics into Covid-19 ill-befits any party leader in the Parliament. I am sure that Willie Rennie will not have found the First Minister or any SNP politician spouting the rubbish that he claims. Mr Rennie said that

“Anti-English rhetoric has reared its ugly head at different points throughout this crisis and there is no place for it.”

Just as he is not responsible for the comments of his supporters, no other party leader in the Parliament is responsible for the people who support them, and no party leader is responsible for people who are not members of their party but who support their particular cause. If Willie Rennie wants to intervene, I will take his intervention.

**Willie Rennie:** I certainly do.

That was an astonishing remark. Nationalists right across the country have claimed directly that the source of the rise of the virus in Scotland is England. That is something that has not been refuted enough by the leadership of the various political parties in this Parliament. I will stand up and do that at every opportunity, because we are one United Kingdom and we should be standing together against the virus, rather than trying to divide the country. I regret the comment from Stuart McMillan.

**Stuart McMillan:** Sadly, I regret the comments from Mr Rennie, because once again he cannot rise to the occasion on the issue of Covid-19.

It has been clear from the outset that a four-nations process to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic is important. The Scottish Parliament and the First Minister have attempted to deliver that. The Scottish Government continues to press the UK Government to ensure that an adequate four-nations approach is taken, in particular on the necessary funding for Scottish businesses and workers. The support that the Scottish Government is providing is the maximum that can be afforded under current powers and with the resources that are available. That is why dialogue and discussion must continue.

Earlier this year, the Welsh First Minister, Mark Drakeford, called for a UK-wide lockdown strategy and criticised the UK Government for its policy and its

“tendency to keep its cards too close to its own chest and then late in the day revealing their thinking to other governments.”

I disagreed with Mr Drakeford then, and still do, about a full UK wide lockdown. I agree with Jackson Carlaw’s comment that

“a national strategy can allow for variations, different nations operating at a different pace reflecting their circumstances.”

I agreed with Jackson Carlaw when he said that, and I think that the comment is still relevant today. If a full UK-wide strategy were to be implemented, it would not be able to provide for local actions for local situations, which Mr Rennie talked about. He spoke of wanting plans to allow people to follow the rules, but he also spoke of the potential

confusion of messaging in local authority areas if there are differing circumstances in those areas.

The UK Government's three-tier system will be helpful for England, and I welcome that, but I also believe that the Scottish Government's five-tier strategy improves on what has been in place in Scotland. In the future, another strategy will come along that will improve on what has been announced today.

Covid-19 does not stand still, and scientists are learning every single day. That is why I genuinely welcome what has been published. I welcome the framework and the fact that it is based on local authority areas and not solely on health board areas.

Inverclyde is surrounded by areas, apart from Argyll and Bute, in which the rate has been a lot higher than ours. I would like Inverclyde to be placed in a tier that helps the economy to reopen under the appropriate measures. Tier 2 would be ideal. The proposals today for the new set of tier 3 rules are a huge step forward, but tier 2 would be advantageous for my local area. On 24 October, Inverclyde had 52 new cases, while neighbouring Renfrewshire had 383 and North Ayrshire had 310, although I accept that North Ayrshire is in the NHS Ayrshire and Arran area. Our rate is certainly lower than that of our neighbours. Inverclyde has 68.1 cases per 100,000 whereas Renfrewshire has 222.8 per 100,000 and North Ayrshire has 239 per 100,000.

I accept that there would be a challenge if there was additional flexibility, because people will travel. It has been documented that people travelled from Glasgow to Helensburgh last weekend. That would certainly happen in Inverclyde as well. That could take the risk into areas that have lower numbers of cases.

I genuinely welcome the five-tier strategy and the framework, which I know will be beneficial for every community. We are very much aware that we have to do what we have to do, because we want to have a Christmas, and we want a better outcome for every single person—not just in Scotland and the rest of the UK, but globally.

17:02

**Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab):** Scotland has already paid a heavy price in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic, but we have reached a critical point. We need to reassure the public that the latest strategy, which was published over the past few days, is workable. It needs to win the trust and support of ordinary people. We await the official announcement on Thursday of how the country is to be divided up, although the First Minister has given us a rough indication, and it already feels grim.

We know that the problem is global and that we are not alone. We are doing better than we were, but we are still far from having the issue under control by WHO standards. The failure of the track and trace system is one of the key reasons why we are not doing better. We have had low compliance rates, and I know many people who are still waiting to be contacted when they know that they have been in the presence of someone who has had a positive result. There is still much to be done on that. We need to learn the lessons of the countries that have had success in that regard. The key is to test, track and trace—over the past seven months, that message has not really changed.

We must also aim for a mass testing strategy to open up the economy. Many workers who play key roles on the front line, such as our health workers and care workers, as well as retail workers, who face the public every day, are beginning to ask whether they should be tested. I just mention that in passing.

The basic principle should be that, if an area is shut down because of a decision based on public health, there has to be support for people and businesses in that area. We will have to see how effective the recent restrictions prove to be, although the First Minister has said that there are early signs that the figures are improving. We are now moving to a five-tier matrix, which is already causing considerable confusion and raises many questions about how decisions will be made and whether we are on the right path. Transparency and simplicity are paramount; without them, there will be confusion, which helps no one.

As other Labour members have said, I would have preferred to have been a full participant in the process of scrutinising the framework, which I believe is my job. The Government's business manager said earlier that the view was that we should just have a debate, but I want to make clear that that was not Labour's view. For the past seven months, we have been used to questioning the First Minister. I give her credit for standing at her desk in the chamber and answering our questions, but I just do not see why today should be any different.

As Neil Findlay said in his intervention, we must have a chance to consult businesses and people on our approach to the framework.

Our constituents demand of us that decisions be backed up by clear data and that it be possible for the process to be easily followed, because the businesses that will have restrictions put on them, which should receive conventional financial support, still have many questions that have not been answered.



The well-worn statement that “We’re all in this together” might be true, but some people are suffering considerably more than others, and each of the decisions that are taken will affect ordinary people as well as businesses. We must be mindful of the people who have lost their jobs as the lockdown framework has impacted on some of the biggest sectors, such as hospitality. Sadly, more people will lose their jobs as that impact continues.

There is already confusion and divisive arguments about what a cafe is and what a restaurant is. Members of the hospitality sector know that it is their sector that is expected to have more closures in the coming months, depending on what level they happen to be in. Therefore, we must ensure that their questions are answered.

**The First Minister:** I understand the difficulties for hospitality in general and for cafes and restaurants in particular, but does Pauline McNeill recognise that, under the new proposals, all premises will be subject to the same rules under level 3, so there will be no distinctions between cafes, restaurants and pubs? I hope that she welcomes that as a useful step forward.

**Pauline McNeill:** I absolutely welcome that. I also welcome what the First Minister said about listening to some of the ideas of the hospitality sector about how to make the process smoother. It is extremely important that people sign up to a strategy that is in no way divisive, as the previous regulations were. Therefore, I whole-heartedly welcome the change in that respect.

However, although the strategic framework provides indicators, it does not tell us when the threshold will have been reached. I think that the First Minister said earlier that that is clear, but it is not clear to me, from what I have read so far. She has given an indicative view on the position that North and South Lanarkshire and Glasgow might be in. I can see that North Lanarkshire has a rate of 335 positive cases per 100,000 of the population, South Lanarkshire has a rate of 375 per 100,000 and Glasgow has a rate of 308 per 100,000, but I am not clear about what level they would need to be at to be put into tier 3 or tier 4, because only indicators have been provided. It would be helpful to get an answer to that.

**The First Minister:** The ranges at each level are set out in the technical paper that we have published today, although I appreciate that members will not have had a chance to absorb that in full.

The point that I made earlier is important. The statistics—the number of cases per 100,000, the test positivity rates and the projections for health service capacity—will guide the decisions, but it is inevitable that a degree of judgment will have to be applied in relation to the interconnections

between different areas, whether the number of cases is going up or down and whether there is community transmission or a series of smaller outbreaks. It will not be an algorithm-based approach. The statistics will guide fuller decisions.

**Pauline McNeill:** All that I ask is that the way in which that judgment is applied is clear and rational, because the use of the term “judgment” implies that the decision that is made might not be clear cut. That is what I ask for. I appreciate the answer that the First Minister gave.

I think that I must close but, in doing so, I want to end on a very positive note. I welcome the First Minister’s announcement on the setting up of an expert group—which I, along with Claire Baker and others, have campaigned for—to look at whether music could return to the hospitality sector. I also ask the First Minister to address the level 0 issues for the night-time economy, because in no scenario would such venues ever open up. I hope that the Government will engage with night clubs and the night-time economy on that.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Some members are having a wee bit of trouble offline, so I am looking to see who we can go to next. Graham Simpson is ready.

17:09

**Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):** I am always ready.

It is good that we are having this debate today. So far, Parliament has been an after-the-event bystander when it comes to dealing with Covid-19. We have not had any meaningful votes. We have scrutinised some quite restrictive measures, but only after they have come into effect, and important matters relating to the pandemic have been announced at daily press conferences rather than to the Parliament. Both those things should make the Presiding Officer as angry as the Speaker of the House of Commons clearly is.

At the start of the pandemic, I thought that the advice that we were all getting was clear and easy to understand: if you do not want to catch the virus, stay away from other people, keep your hands clean and do not touch your face. I felt pretty safe sticking to that, as did most people.

Now, though, we have a somewhat confusing muddle of rules and regulations, and people are finding it hard to comply with what they do not understand. Members will know, because they can see it for themselves, that many people are struggling with the law that says that people cannot have visitors to their home, for example. That brings me on to Christmas. People will go to see family over Christmas. They will travel within Scotland and between the nations of the UK, so

the Governments of the UK need to pull together to find a way that makes things work for people over the festive period.

The plan that was unveiled by the First Minister last week was, to me, a document devoid of hope, because there was nothing about what needs to happen to get us back to normal. People who are making so many sacrifices and businesses deserve a plan that shows them how we can get there. We will support the plan, but it runs the risk of confusing people even more than they are now.

The mood music about getting a vaccine is encouraging, but what if we do not get one any time soon? The restrictions could last for years. The plan provided no detail on what has to happen, and what evidence is expected, to allow an area to move from one tier to another. People and businesses have a right to expect some clarity on that, so the paper that was released earlier today, which sets out some of the indicators, was useful and should be updated for MSPs weekly.

I turn to reports that South Lanarkshire and North Lanarkshire may—I stress “may”—be put into the highest tier. I hope that that is not the case because, if it is, it will mean that the numbers have gone in the wrong direction. The paper that I referred to a moment ago does not look good for Lanarkshire, so we might be heading for the top tier. The paper says that an area will be considered for level 4 if it broadly meets one of five conditions. What do we mean by “broadly”, and why must it meet only one of the conditions? As a local member, I want to know where the cases are, how the experts think they have been spread and what the situation is in Lanarkshire’s hospitals.

**The First Minister:** On the question of where cases in a particular local authority area are, every day, people can go on to the Public Health Scotland website, where that information is updated and goes down to the level of neighbourhoods of 4,000 people. That information is available.

On the second point, there are limits to the evidence on where cases spread, without genomic sequencing, which scientists in Scotland are doing. Beyond that, we have to make assumptions based on the information that comes through the test and protect system. Some of the data cannot be provided in that timescale, but we are working to provide as much as detail as possible, and some of the information that Graham Simpson has called for is already available.

**Graham Simpson:** I thank the First Minister for that answer, and I was very pleased to hear earlier that we will get a postcode checker, which is a great idea.

We have had hospital figures Lanarkshire-wide, but a further breakdown hospital by hospital would be useful. If the Government is to go down the route of putting Lanarkshire into the top tier, it must say how it will protect businesses that will be forced to close. If there are to be travel restrictions, the Government must say how they will work and how they will be enforced. People travel in and between council areas as part of their daily lives. People might drop the kids off at school or do their shopping—normal stuff—in a different council area, so I appeal to the Government to show some flexibility, if that is possible.

The First Minister mentioned this earlier, but would it be fair to apply restrictions in rural areas of Lanarkshire, such as Clydesdale, if the numbers there do not justify that? In all this, I urge the Government to work with elected members in any area that is likely to go into the top tier. I do not think that we have to put things such as areas moving between tiers to a vote every time, but we need detailed discussions so that we can all agree on what is needed to protect public health, while also protecting the economy.

Government has a tough job. Difficult decisions have to be made, and there is a difficult balance to be struck between taking public health measures and protecting the economy and the fabric of our society. I do not envy it, but it is vital that the Government carries the country with it on this journey, which is why it needs to do better at explaining what it wants to do, and why.

17:15

**Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP):** I welcome “COVID-19: Scotland’s Strategic Framework”, and particularly the emphasis that it places on the wellbeing of the most vulnerable, including through the extension of asymptomatic testing to those who are most at risk. I will focus my remarks on one of those groups: people with learning disabilities, whose interests I have raised before. People with learning disabilities do not command the same headlines as some of the other groups who are most affected by the pandemic, but that is all the more reason to draw attention to their needs in the debate.

The Government’s keys to life strategy acknowledges that people with learning disabilities already have poorer health outcomes and die earlier than the rest of the population. Last week, the journal *Annals of Internal Medicine* reported that people with Down’s syndrome have at least a 10 times greater risk of dying of Covid-19 than the general population, based on UK data of 8 million people. In June, the Care Quality Commission in England reported a 134 per cent increase in the deaths of people with a learning disability during the height of the pandemic. However, neither

learning disability nor Down's syndrome is listed in the four-nations guidance as a condition that makes people more vulnerable to Covid-19.

If people with a learning disability live in a care home, they will have the additional protection that comes from asymptomatic testing of the carers who support them. I very much welcome that and the fact that such testing is moving to the NHS. However, most people with a learning disability do not live in a care home, and their carers are not tested weekly—even though the strategy document says that routine testing includes “non elderly adult settings”. It would be good to get some clarity on that.

Many people with learning disabilities, including those with very high support needs, have been moved into community settings, but, in practical terms, those settings carry the same risks as care homes. People with significant needs will live in small complexes, perhaps with five to 20 other people, receiving 24-hour support that includes close personal care. That means that the infection risks that apply to those complexes are similar to those that apply to care homes. People in such supported accommodation are subject to the same curtailments of their freedom as people in care homes, because they are vulnerable.

I know that charities such as Enable and Epilepsy Scotland have called for routine testing in those settings, so I welcome the Government's commitment and look forward to more detail on when it is delivered. I understand that home care workers should also be included, as they look after people with learning disabilities as well. If there is a capacity issue, I would suggest that those complexes where people receive 24-hour care alongside other people in supported accommodation should come first.

I have a personal interest in the matter, as I have said before. My sister has Down's syndrome and lives in supported accommodation in Inverclyde. When it was a bit warmer and I was sitting with her in the shared garden there, one of the fantastic members of staff who look after her told me that her husband worked in a care home nearby and was tested every Monday morning. She simply could not understand why the people she cared for were not offered similar protection. It was the people she cared for, not her own health, that she was thinking about.

The strategy document also places a welcome emphasis on wellbeing—particularly that of the most vulnerable. I know that the cabinet secretary for health has written a very welcome letter to directors of social work on the isolation that is experienced by people with learning disabilities as a result of the closure of adult day services—or adult resource centres, as they are sometimes known. In that letter, the cabinet secretary

emphasised the importance of those services and urged their safe reopening, and she emphasised the importance of putting meaningful alternative provision in place where capacity is reduced. However, the feedback that I have had from all over the country is that little or nothing has been put in place to compensate for the closure of ARCs. Because of that, hundreds of people have been left at home, and their carers are under enormous pressure.

In South Scotland, where I live, one local authority is now undertaking remote needs assessments before it provides alternative support, and that process is causing real distress. A carer in my constituency who supports her learning-disabled sister was told that, if they moved to self-directed support to replace the day centre provision while it was closed, the funding would cover only basic needs such as feeding and washing. The social stimulation, leisure and friendship that her sister got at the day centre would not be replaced, and the carer was told that, if she hired a personal assistant to fulfil those basic needs, her sister could permanently lose her place at the adult day centre, which would cut her off from all the familiar activities that had given her life meaning for the past 20 years. That is not a person-centred approach, and I am sure that all members agree that it is not an acceptable approach.

In concluding, I ask again that people with learning disabilities be given the health protections that they need by the testing of anyone whom they rely on for close personal care, and that local health and social care partnerships and local authorities ensure that people with learning disabilities, as well as having their basic needs looked after, are treated as human beings with a right to companionship, recreation and meaningful activity.

17:21

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** Yesterday, 442,721 people across the globe tested positive for Covid-19. On a seven-day rolling average, that is the highest-ever number, as was the 21,926 cases across the UK. Worldwide, 5,922 deaths were recorded and, sadly, it looks likely that there will be more than 1.5 million deaths by the end of the year.

However, the virus seems to have hugely varying impacts. Singapore has had 57,980 positive tests and 28 deaths. That is a mortality rate of less than one in 2,000. Gibraltar and the Faroe Islands, with 670 and 490 positive cases respectively, have reported not a single fatality between them. In dealing with a seemingly idiosyncratic virus, it is no wonder that leaders

across the world are struggling to know how best to reverse the pandemic.

It is clear that Covid-19 will impact our lives for the foreseeable future. I am sure that we have all been contacted by constituents demanding full lockdown or a complete lifting of all restrictions—and, no doubt, everything in between. Folk are exhausted and often bewildered. The Scottish Government is constantly striving to balance national and local restrictions to best protect Scotland's health and economy. The introduction of a more comprehensive levels system in place of ad hoc restrictions is welcome in such circumstances.

As the First Minister stated in introducing the framework, it must be approached with an open mind. We must listen to stakeholders and communities to ensure that they are properly supported through the next phase of the pandemic. My view is that that support should include more nuanced restrictions once the new local authority provisions bed in.

Until last week, the Isle of Arran had been virus free for four months, but people and businesses were put under the same stringent conditions that the central belt was put under. The small cluster of confirmed cases on the island have been effectively contact traced and managed. That shows that, even with the recent return of coronavirus, Arran is not the same as the mainland. In Argyll and Bute, which other members have already mentioned, the differences are even starker. One can see the Western Isles from Tiree but not Helensburgh, which is 142 miles away by road and ferry.

As we move into a new phase of fighting the virus, we need more targeted restrictions, which I look forward to seeing in due course.

The widespread adoption of masks is one of the most obvious ways in which the public have complied with regulations to make Scotland safer. The Scottish Government acted decisively and before other parts of the UK in making face coverings mandatory on public transport and in shops, and it has provided comprehensive guidance on proper hygiene while wearing a mask.

We know that a mask should cover our face and nose, to wash our hands before putting a mask on and to avoid touching our masks and faces. However, there is some confusion regarding other aspects of correct usage. Constituents have asked pertinent questions that have not yet been addressed by guidance. The advice is to wash face coverings after use, and

“after a school day, or a trip to the supermarket”

are given as examples. It would be helpful to have clarity on what counts as one use, as the examples that are given vary. Should a face covering be washed at 60°C after every single wear? If a person travelled on a train and took a mask off at the end of the journey, would a clean mask be required for the journey home? The advice is to wash our hands after removing a mask. Should we also wash our face? It may seem that mask hygiene is simple common sense, but it is brand new to most of us. I am sure that we can agree that the more clarity and guidance that is provided, the safer mask compliance will be and the more effectively we can control the virus.

We must also recognise that Covid-19 is not the only risk to health and wellbeing this winter. As the nights draw in, we face a wave of loneliness and isolation. I have been contacted by older constituents who are deeply concerned about the coming months. They are, of course, wary of coronavirus and follow all the necessary guidance and regulations.

The First Minister announced in Friday's briefing that, right up to level 4 restrictions, six people from up to two households will be allowed to meet outside. That compromise was first reached in the summer, as a way of allowing people to safely interact with others outside their own households. It undoubtedly helped many people over the warmer months. However, we are asking much, much more of people if they can meet up only in that way over the winter, when it is cold, wet and dark. Some of my older constituents, in particular, are worried that they face a choice between braving potentially hazardous weather conditions and spending their winter alone, not seeing anyone at all. Liam McArthur has already touched on island communities, where meeting places are perhaps fewer and farther between.

I therefore ask the Scottish Government to increase the flexibility for single people and even couples to meet safely indoors. That might take the form of couples and individuals having a chance to meet in each other's homes—perhaps three or four people from a maximum of two households—while observing social distancing and any additional regulations that are deemed necessary. Any increased risk of transmission must be balanced against the positive impact on people's physical and mental health.

The next few months are going to be hard for us all, but we will get through it. However, those months cannot be about just avoiding the virus: being alive is about more than having a heartbeat. We must continue to work with our communities and give people the chance to live, not just survive.

Thousands of men and women play organised amateur football, which is the only adult grade of

Scottish football that has been stopped, even though they follow all the same protocols as all clubs outside the top two leagues. In 2018, the Union of European Football Associations reported that amateur football saved NHS Scotland £690 million by helping to prevent 5,000 mental health cases and by reducing cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes, among other diseases, as well as adding £200 million to the Scottish economy and providing £300 million in social benefits. I therefore urge the Scottish ministers to allow amateur football to restart so that it can continue delivering those benefits, which will otherwise be lost both to the individuals and to Scotland.

The Scottish Government has acted commendably throughout the crisis, and it would be inconceivable to expect it or any other Government to navigate such difficult, unprecedented times without putting a foot wrong. Like elsewhere, some things have been handled well and some have not gone to plan, and there will be more of both as we progress. However, the next phase must continue to be informed by the science in order to protect quality of life as well as life itself. It will be a balancing act, but, provided that we proceed with open minds and that we are prepared to listen and adapt where necessary, we can bring Scotland through this.

17:26

**Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab):** In starting any speech on the subject of Covid-19, we must remember all those who have died and send our condolences to their families. Many people are also suffering from long Covid, and although the majority of them might fully recover, it is certainly not a virus that anyone wants to catch, particularly not those with underlying health conditions.

I am also acutely aware, from constituents, that other health service provision is suffering: cancer treatments have been stopped, symptoms have not been picked up and elective surgery has been cancelled. Undoubtedly, people have died because of the restrictions that have been put in place to battle Covid. Their deaths are equally tragic.

People are suffering, whether that is their mental and physical health, or because of their financial situation and the loss of personal contact with family and friends. The havoc that the pandemic is wreaking on our society, particularly on our health and the economy, would have been quite unimaginable just a year ago; so, too, would the idea that our civil liberties and human rights would be so restricted.

The Scottish Government's framework document, which the Parliament is being asked in

the motion to note—not to endorse—speaks of principles that include a commitment to fairness to “uphold the principles of human dignity, autonomy, respect and equality”.

However, with rising inequality and the gap between rich and poor growing, the Covid-19 pandemic is undoubtedly impacting people differently across our country not just by local authority or health board area, but by class.

The equality and human rights impact of some of the steps that are laid out in the framework that was published last Friday in the different tier levels do not seem to have been scrutinised. It is crucial that those aspects are scrutinised not only to combat the virus successfully, but to meet the obligations on equality and respecting our human rights.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation pointed out in its latest poverty in Scotland report—“Poverty in Scotland 2020: The independent annual report”—that thousands of families who have never accessed the social security system before will now be seeking support. Women, disabled and young people are the hardest hit. I do not think that the interventions are quite bold enough, nor do the proposals tackle isolation and loneliness.

The First Minister told us that the 16-day period was a short and sharp action. However, last night's leaked information told us that—the First Minister has confirmed this today—Lanarkshire may be put into even more draconian measures, despite being an area of higher deprivation. We need clarity on where the outbreaks are. Are they in care homes, schools or hospitals? Can the outbreaks still be in the hospitality industry when many locations have been closed for so long? To consider if the measures are proportionate, we need specifics.

**The First Minister:** I will make what is perhaps the third plug today for the Public Health Scotland website. Anybody can go on to it, and it is updated daily. People can look at their local area and see the breakdown of cases at a very local level. There is a demographic breakdown and an age breakdown. We have tried to improve it as much as possible, but given some of the comments in the chamber today, it is clear that people are not as aware of it as they should be. I hope that this debate will help to rectify that.

**Elaine Smith:** Maybe that will help to make the public more aware, because it is obvious that they are still confused. I do not know whether infections are still increasing in hospitality settings given that many of those have been closed. We need answers on that.

From listening to my constituents, I know that anxiety is on the rise, support is hard to find and a

sense of confusion is evident, despite what the First Minister has said. Perhaps that is why we need more scrutiny and questions in Parliament, rather than just having plans put in front of us for us to note.

The restrictions do not deliver consistency in a way that is understood or in a way that gives confidence that the growing inequalities will be addressed.

**The First Minister:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Elaine Smith:** If the First Minister wants to intervene again, Presiding Officer, I am happy to let her do so, as long as you give me the time back. I think that we should have had a question-and-answer session today.

**The First Minister:** Sorry—I might be wrong, but I had understood that Labour wanted us to have a motion that said “note” and not “endorse”. If I am wrong about that, I will stand corrected.

**Elaine Smith:** We were given sight of the First Minister’s proposal, but we did not comment on whether we wanted a motion that said “note”. We wanted a question-and-answer session today and a debate tomorrow, when we all would have had more time to digest what she had put in front of us. That would have provided a much better level of scrutiny all round—including for her, I would suggest—rather than having all this back and forth with interventions and questions.

As I said, the restrictions do not deliver consistency. There are so many variations, and the rules are not easy to make sense of. For example, visiting a lonely friend or relative in their home can be a crime, but meeting them in a busy cafe is allowed; and attending a wedding reception in a hotel with 20 others is acceptable, but social distancing in a local restaurant where strict safety measures have been introduced is not acceptable. So many services are accessible only online, but thousands of my constituents have no access to wi-fi or a computer, so there will be no digital Christmas for them. On the one hand, the Government speaks of the importance of the high streets, communities and local economies; on the other hand, small businesses that have put in practice health protections are facing closure.

Of course the UK chancellor should increase and extend support packages for businesses and individuals, but the Scottish Government needs to be bolder. For example, it needs to give priority to local suppliers for the school meals contracts, to ensure the necessary food deliveries and to ensure that local shops remain open in the future.

The framework speaks of the principle of evidence, but the rules are changing so quickly that it does not seem possible even to have

collated the evidence, let alone draw conclusions. For the rules to be followed with confidence, people need to know more about exactly what works and what does not. The rule of six was brought in for private homes, but it was hardly given any time to be judged when it was then ruled out. There has been no explanation of the science that allows hundreds of schoolchildren to mix with each other and their teachers and support staff. Of course no one wants schools to close and children to lose out on vital education, but many children have been sent home to isolate for 14 days due to Covid outbreaks in the classroom. How is that affecting their learning? With regard to students, will they be tested before returning to halls of residences after Christmas? That is hugely important.

Hospitality businesses were asked to put in place safety measures, and the vast majority spent money doing so. Why are they all being treated as though they have broken the rules? Why was Scotland the only country in the world to ban background music in pubs and clubs? What was the science behind that?

With businesses closing, travel and tourism devastated and the economy shrinking, how is the loss of jobs and the resultant poverty going to affect our children and young people’s future? If those decisions are political instead of science based, we need to hear that from the First Minister; then people can judge whether they are proportionate.

We are now being asked to support a five-tier system, which starts at 0 and ends at 4—actually, we have been asked to note rather than endorse the plan, which means that we are merely observers. What will be the indicators for the proposed tiers? Will they include rates among the over-60s, care home outbreaks, or testing-positive cases by area?

At the start of the pandemic, when it was clearly an emergency, and, as described by the First Minister, beyond politics, it would surely have been preferable for the Scottish Government to be truly non-political and set up a coalition unity executive to tackle the situation in a cross-party way. However, the First Minister chose to do it herself. Parliament has handed unprecedented power to the First Minister and her Government, but we must now have a much greater role in scrutinising all of this. It must be transparent, and we must have the raw data that underpins the decisions. When such information is made available, there might be more democracy.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Can you wind up, please?

**Elaine Smith:** Despite the First Minister somehow laughing about that, we all want to see

the Government and wider society succeed in the fight against the virus, but members of the Parliament must be able to hold the Scottish Government to account, to publicly scrutinise its decisions and actions and to help in the national effort to tackle the pandemic. I urge support for Labour's amendment.

17:35

**Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP):** I am speaking as a member of the Scottish Parliament and a resident of North Lanarkshire, which, as we all know, is currently one of hardest-hit areas in the country. Last week, we learned from NHS Lanarkshire that our hospitals were coming close to capacity and that university hospital Monklands, which is only a mile or so from where I live, was again closing to non-essential procedures.

I recently spoke to a friend who works at Monklands. She worked on the specialist Covid ward during the earlier part of the year. I could hear the worry in her voice as she warned that things were getting bad and that pressure was building, and she was worried about going through it all again. She pleaded with me to make sure that others take Covid seriously. We must listen to the people on the front line. Our NHS cannot be allowed to become overwhelmed.

Lanarkshire is in a hard place. I am sure that I am not just speaking for the Coatbridge and Chryston part of the local authority when I say that, whatever tier we go into, we will do whatever it takes to get the virus under control.

**Neil Findlay:** The member said that we must listen to the people on the front line, and I agree with him. Does he agree that it is extraordinary that, almost eight months down the line, front-line healthcare workers are not being tested regularly?

**Fulton MacGregor:** I thank the member for that intervention, but I think that the testing system is working well. I will come to that later in my speech. Test and protect is working well in Scotland and constant attacks on it are not helping anybody.

I fully welcome the strategic framework. It gives more clarity about what is acceptable and what is essential in terms of activities and travelling in and out of areas that have different infection rates. That clarity is needed because there is evidence in front of us every day that people are not always clear about matters. I am not playing the blame game because I believe that the majority of people are trying to do the right thing by putting personal safety measures in place. We have got from the summer to the point where we are now gradually and, as we approach winter, it is time to take stock and do things a bit differently.

Even before we saw last night's leaked email, most of us in Lanarkshire expected to be in tier 3 as an absolute minimum. If that is the case, businesses in our area will need more support. Some could be shut for six to eight weeks, or longer, and we know that they employ a significant number of people in some of our most deprived areas. The grants are good, and they are welcome, but the reality is that we will need more.

This is when I turn to the members who are sitting on my left. I am well aware that this is a Scottish Parliament debate, but we cannot escape the hard reality that the UK Government needs to step up to the plate and support businesses in our most deprived areas. It is unthinkable that a blank cheque has been given to other parts of the UK but not in Scotland. No way could any Tory—whether they are a constituency MSP in central Scotland or are a list member for the region, or anywhere else—sit back and allow central belt areas to be put under tougher restrictions and for us to be treated as second rate.

To go back to what the Scottish Government can do, I welcome today's news that nightclubs and soft play centres will be given additional funding. I have contacted the Government several times on behalf of those who operate such businesses in my constituency, as have many other members. It is great that the Government has taken action.

Last week, I publicised on social media that I was hoping to speak in today's debate, and I asked constituents to get in touch. I have already had answers for most of them, especially given the updated framework that was sent around this morning. For example, I was contacted by Buzz Bingo in Coatbridge, which outlined the benefits of bingo and the safety measures that have been put in place. I was therefore pleased that it is now anticipated that bingo will be able to resume at tier 2. I thank the manager, Gordon Barr, for getting in touch.

Similarly, given some of the queries that I have received, I am happy to hear that there is clarity about travel when there are shared parenting arrangements. It is important that we avoid placing additional pressures on families that might harm children and young people as we move into winter.

Some constituents who have contacted me about weddings will be happy to learn of the proposal to increase the number of guests to 15, even in areas that are placed in tier 4—as might happen in Lanarkshire, as we heard from the First Minister, although we hope that that will not happen.

On other issues about which I have been contacted, no change is proposed. For example, people have asked me about adult outdoor contact

sports, particularly amateur and other football, which Kenny Gibson mentioned. I think that other members who represent central Scotland have had similar queries. I think that tier 3 is, unfortunately, the right one in this context. I say that as a footballer—I use the word lightly—who is not likely to get back to the game for some time. Tier 3 is probably the right level in relation to adult contact sports.

However, as someone who has organised football as well as played it, I know the social and emotional benefits that it and similar sports bring to people. We must hope that the current tiers deliver and that people can, over a short period, work towards getting down to tier 2, at which such activities can resume. That is a benefit of the tier system—it is not that there is no end in sight.

Perhaps the most contact that I have had has been about schools. As a father, as well as an MSP, I agree that schools should close only as a last resort. The enhanced and targeted measures in the framework should be fleshed out a bit, to make clear what they mean. I think that people expect there to be the power to close schools for short periods if necessary, but there should be a planned end to the closure, unlike the situation that we experienced earlier this year.

There are cases of infection in schools. Every day, North Lanarkshire Council provides data to elected representatives—there has been excellent communication from the council throughout the pandemic. Almost every night, we learn of at least one school where a pupil or staff member has tested positive and a number of people are isolating, and the numbers have been increasing gradually. In last night's briefing, we learned that 27 schools are affected across the authority area. That reflects the wider situation in Lanarkshire. It also shows that test and protect is working.

Let me be crystal clear: I endorse the plan and very much want schools to remain open—at almost all cost. However, constituents are telling me that if we need short and sharp action against the virus—as opposed to action that lasts for months—everything should be on the table and they would be willing to accept such measures.

I have run out of time. I welcome the framework, the scrutiny of it and the opportunity to raise constituents' concerns.

17:42

**Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con):** It is clear that Scotland is in a precarious place. People have made enormous sacrifices to halt the spread of the virus, but it remains incredibly stubborn. Cases remain worryingly high and each tragic death that results from Covid-19 reminds us of the gravity of the situation.

As the spread of the virus accelerates, the only logical option is to adapt by introducing more restrictive measures. My party agrees that such an approach, although it is painful, is the only effective way to safeguard public health.

On Sunday, it was reported that in El Paso County, in Texas, hospitals have reached full capacity, as cases have risen sharply, putting the health service under immense strain and requiring health officials to seek additional morgue space. Although El Paso is far from home, such news from around the world reminds us of the value of our NHS and those who work in it. It is vital that we protect it if we are ultimately to save lives.

Having said that, I want to talk about two serious concerns that my constituents have raised. Everyone understands that saving lives is the number 1 priority, but we cannot lose sight of the fact that the restrictions will place enormous pressure on individuals and businesses across the country. For example, the effects of redundancy can be financial insecurity and immense strain on mental health. That is why I expect businesses in Glasgow to be disappointed by the SNP Government's treatment of them. The confusion about the definitions of "restaurant" and "cafe" continues to cause frustration in the hospitality industry. However, I am also pleased to hear that the First Minister has acted on that, in the new guidance.

A local eatery in Glasgow's east end, whose owner employs 17 people, was forced to close by Glasgow City Council. The owner is rightly angry, as the council could not provide an answer to his question concerning the difference between his establishment and other businesses in the local area whose premises remain open. I have written to Glasgow City Council to urgently clarify what the specific guidance is for such businesses.

However, that gets to the heart of the problem with the new guidance, in that the SNP has consistently failed to engage with businesses. That has direct consequences for people's wellbeing and livelihoods. People's jobs are on the line. The SNP must start to take those concerns seriously, before it is too late.

I turn to the impact of the pandemic on our elderly and vulnerable. In my view, which I am sure that members will share, the fortitude that they have shown throughout the crisis has been an inspiration to us all. For those who are most vulnerable, this is an especially difficult time.

That has hit close to home, as my mum, who has always prided herself on her work, has had to make the difficult decision to retire, due to her anxiety about contracting Covid. Her work was her lifeline, as it allowed her to speak to friends and co-workers; she cherished that social contact,



which she and many others will dearly miss. Naturally, I want to support her through that and to be with her as much as possible, but because of the restrictions and the social distancing guidelines, and because she has a son who stays down south, my mum, along with many others, will feel the pinch of the new measures. That is why I am delighted to support the amendment in Ruth Davidson's name, which calls on the Scottish Government to develop and publish a Christmas loneliness strategy. These past few months have been brutal, and my mum and others need hope that families can be reunited, in some form, for Christmas.

I want to draw attention to the shambolic situation with the flu vaccine. Despite the Scottish Government's pledge to scale up the seasonal flu vaccination programme, its roll-out in the NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde area has been disgraceful. I have received countless emails from constituents, many of whom are contacting me on behalf of their elderly parents; one described the process as "farcical". Vulnerable people are having to wait far too long to receive their jab, and many have still not received it. With many remaining anxious because of the prevalence of Covid, that is simply not acceptable.

If a coronavirus vaccine is developed in the next few months, the SNP must put in place more robust provisions to ensure that we avoid the problems that people have experienced so far with the roll-out of the seasonal flu vaccine.

Around the world, everyone accepts that we will inevitably encounter difficulty as we combat the virus. However, as Opposition MSPs, it is the job of my colleagues and me to hold the SNP Government to account. It is failing business and offering little reassurance to our most vulnerable people. That is deeply regrettable.

17:48

**Alex Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP):** I speak in support of the Scottish Government's motion, but I also welcome many of the suggestions that have been made in the debate from across the parties. I think that people in Scotland want us in the Scottish Parliament to operate as part of team Scotland, and the tone of the debate has been very helpful indeed.

I particularly welcome some of the announcements that have been made today. I think that, in deciding who is in which tier, it is a good idea to move from health board areas to local authority areas, for the simple reason that there is wide variation within large health board areas such as Ayrshire and Lanarkshire. It is therefore appropriate that we look at local

government areas, in which we can pinpoint more accurately where the real problems exist.

I also welcome the flexibility that has been introduced in going below the local authority level into localities. We have already heard about the possibility of different treatment for different islands in Scotland, and about the likes of small remote rural communities coming into a similar category. That is quite right, and I think that it is progress.

I welcome the relaxation in relation to bingo, for example, and the money for soft-play businesses and nightclubs. I particularly welcome the fact that restaurants and pubs are now on an equal footing with cafes.

I agree with Kenneth Gibson that it would be helpful if the Government reconsidered the status and standing of amateur football. There is irritation among amateur footballers that they are not on a similar standing to players at senior and junior clubs, particularly given their importance in tackling issues such as obesity among many younger and middle-aged people. I hope that that will be reconsidered.

I have a number of suggestions to make about what we also need to be considering on top of everything else that the Government is doing. Right at the core of the strategy is the need to reduce the level of hospitalisation. The need for the restrictions that we have had to impose is driven, to a large extent—[Inaudible.]—is not overwhelmed by the number of people who are admitted to hospital.

Some progress has been made with some of the new drugs that have been developed since the beginning, which allow the length of stay in hospital to be reduced. That is very much to be welcomed; let us hope that many of the other antiviral drugs that are currently in development come on stream reasonably quickly, which will help.

A lot of work has been done, particularly down south, on profiling patients who are most at risk of needing hospitalisation. I think that those profiling protocols could be very helpful in identifying early on those in the community who are most likely to need hospitalisation. At the same time, we could put in place a strategy for earlier intervention using drugs and treatment to see whether it is possible to reduce the number of people identified as likely to need hospitalisation once they reach a certain stage and to prevent at least a number of them—albeit probably not anything like all of them—from ending up in hospital.

We need to do a bit more work on what is happening in other countries, most notably Japan, where people have focused on the need to deal with so-called superspreaders. The research

seems to show that a small number of people with Covid pass it on to a very large percentage of those who get it from someone else. Some studies show that up to 80 per cent of people are infected by a relatively small number of superspreaders. It would be helpful to identify superspreading situations and to intervene very quickly, as that has been shown to be helpful in countries such as Japan in reducing the prevalence and spread of the virus.

A suggestion has been made by one of the Scottish Government's own advisers that, instead of just isolating contacts who have been identified through test and protect, we should also be testing those people. As the capacity ramps up to 65,000 in the weeks ahead, I hope that some of that capacity could be used in that way. If that testing is done quickly, it might prevent a lot of the spread that is happening.

If the so-called swab in the gob, as it is being referred to, is introduced more quickly, with turnaround times in minutes rather than days following analysis of the test, that will allow for a scale of testing that has so far proved to be impossible. Getting to mass-scale testing would clearly be beneficial.

Somebody mentioned the need for an exit strategy. The exit strategy is a safe and effective vaccine, hopefully coupled with safe and effective antiviral treatments, which we do not have at present. However, we need a bridge, not just until a vaccine is authorised but for the time it will take to distribute that vaccine to people.

We need a vaccination strategy that, among other things, takes on the anti-vaxxers and tries to pre-empt any damage that they might do, as they did with the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine many years ago. We cannot afford not to vaccinate the requisite number of people in order to put an end to this nightmare that we have been going through since February and March and which, unfortunately, we are likely to be going through for some time yet.

17:55

**Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab):** I pay tribute to all those who continue to work on the front line to try to suppress the virus and save lives. I recognise the efforts of all those who are working round the clock to try to beat the virus, whether that be those in government, officials or those on the front line. I send my condolences to anyone who has lost a loved one during the pandemic.

At this point, seven months into Covid-19 and into the second wave, it is right to reflect on and recognise what has worked and what has failed or gone wrong, and to decide what the focus and

priorities should be going forward. Fundamentally, this is about saving lives and livelihoods.

To be clear from the outset, even today, I want the Government to succeed. I will support it, and I have done so, when I think that it has got the approach right, and I will continue to constructively challenge in the right tone and in the right spirit when I think that the Government has got things wrong or that it can do better.

I put on record that, although I support attempts to control the virus, I do not think that we can be blind to the challenges and consequence of how we respond to it. I fear that how we have responded may in itself cost more lives than the virus will cost. There is an impact on health, both mental and physical, through things such as the pause in cancer services and screening and issues with speed of diagnosis and cancelled operations. There are also issues of isolation and loneliness and the hurt of loss. There is poverty, and in some cases extreme poverty. There are job losses and unemployment, and general uncertainty. Many families across the country, particularly many women and children, are having to live in difficult circumstances and perhaps in really difficult households. We need to be alive to all those issues.

One area in which we rightly commend the First Minister is communications. I accept that, thankfully, the First Minister is a better communicator than the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, although perhaps that is not a high bar. However, we have a hard lesson to learn as we enter the second wave, and that is that an effective communication strategy is not the same as a virus elimination strategy. There will be communication challenges as we go forward, and they will be even more difficult. We will have 32 different local authorities perhaps having different sets of restrictions. Having five tiers of restrictions will not help to keep the message simple, which will cause challenges.

Willie Rennie mentioned that, a few months ago, we were being told that we were in the midst of a zero Covid strategy and that we had a chance to eliminate the virus by the end of the summer. That was simply untrue, and we should not have allowed it to happen.

**The First Minister:** The member talks a lot of sense, and I take him seriously, but that was not untrue. We probably did virtually eliminate the virus but, with winter coming on and lockdown being lifted, that becomes much more difficult, as countries across the world are finding. Does the member agree that, had we not suppressed the virus so firmly in the summer months, we would now be in a much more challenging situation? We face challenges but, if we look across the UK and Europe, we see that our position is not as severe

as that of some other countries. We should not be complacent, but that is because we put so much emphasis on elimination over the summer months.

**Anas Sarwar:** I completely agree with that, and I supported the suppression that we did over the summer months, but it is important to recognise that, in those summer months, we still had the third or fourth worst death and infection rates anywhere in Europe. The Government and senior advisers said that we had a zero Covid strategy and that the world could learn from Scotland. We have to accept that we are now in this for the long haul and that getting people back into restrictions again is much more difficult if they think that the restrictions that happened before were not just a one-off exercise but could now be cyclical until we have a vaccine.

If there is any lesson to be learned from the flu vaccination roll-out programme, it is that we have a lot of work to do to ensure that people have confidence in the roll-out of the vaccine. That programme should have been the dry run, but the dry run has sadly not been good enough.

Going back to my earlier point, I think that the communication is very important, because we have to maintain confidence and public support. As the restrictions get more complicated and as there are some perceived contradictions or inconsistencies, that risks public support and buy-in for what we are trying to do.

We were told that the full lockdown was about helping to strengthen our systems. Yes, it was about protecting the NHS and saving lives, but it was also to give us time to prepare and strengthen our systems. One of those was our test and protect system, which we were told would help us to isolate the virus and stop its spread. It is doing that, but it is not doing it anywhere near as much as we need it to. The test and protect system was meant, largely, to be the answer.

**Jeane Freeman:** Will the member give way?

**Anas Sarwar:** I am in my last minute; the cabinet secretary can perhaps respond in her closing remarks.

The test and protect system has not helped to suppress and defeat the virus. People's intentions to support the test and protect system and to isolate are high, but adherence is low. A study that was done by King's College London, which looked at figures right across the UK, showed that, of those people who had Covid symptoms, only 18.2 per cent self-isolated, only 11.9 per cent requested a test and only 10.9 per cent reported staying in quarantine for two weeks. I am not saying that people did not have the right intentions. We have to recognise that people have difficult financial constraints. They sometimes have caring responsibilities, restrictions on their

accommodation or difficult personal circumstances at home. We have to ensure that any decisions that we take are rooted in the real world and in real lived experiences.

I recognise that I am in my final seconds. We keep hearing about testing. There are not adequate levels of mass testing and rapid testing. People can go to Boots to get a test kit that gives a result in 12 minutes—that is certainly what the advertisements are saying will happen. Every Scottish Premier League-registered footballer gets a test every week. Why can every care home staff member, NHS staff member or home carer not get a test every week?

In 1957, when we had the tuberculosis crisis, the Glasgow Corporation set up 35 mobile X-ray clinics and units in Glasgow. In two months, it tested 715,000 people. We should be testing at that level of scale and size in order to beat the virus. The legacy of the virus has to be what we learned from it, how we built back better and how we prevented harm in our society. The legacy of the virus cannot be a scarred generation.

18:02

**Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP):** I have just viewed the PHS Covid-19 profile, which highlights what we face and needs more exposure to the public. I was actually quite shocked when I read it.

"COVID-19: Scotland's Strategic Framework" sets out the intended approach to managing and suppressing Covid-19 across Scotland. I note that local NHS boards and local authorities will be consulted on the application of the framework to individual areas, but I have to ask whether local MSPs will also be consulted. There is a commitment to keep schools open at all levels and a promise that an economic package will be put in place to support businesses that might be required to close or have their operations restricted. There will also be support for workers who will be hardest hit by the necessary restrictions.

What will be announced shortly will have a cost for all, and we have to meet that cost. We must support every citizen and family during the pandemic. We cannot see the virus. We might unknowingly touch it. We cannot taste it, but it is still there. We have to defeat the virus, whatever the cost.

Today, I want to speak about what my constituents are facing during the pandemic and how they want clarity and information in relation to going into a higher tier. To respect their privacy, I will give them other names. Ann says that she operates two restaurants, both of which were forced to close on 9 October at 6 pm. Of the 70 staff across both restaurants, only 22 qualified for

furlough during the 16-day closure. She cannot take bookings with no knowledge of whether the restaurants will ever operate again. It is very difficult for her, and she says she had to offer some security to staff who were receiving little or no pay during the closure. In the time between 15 July and 9 October, they had a report of one customer with Covid. They had to close for 24 hours and deep clean at their own cost. They need to continue. They want help and they want to be able to survive. Will Ann get that financial help?

John is a taxi driver. He asks when he will be helped. Business is very bad and he cannot pay his bills. "Please help me," he says. He is self-employed, and every fund that he has applied for has turned him down. He needs that support. He is one of the many who have been missed.

One of the other problems that we have is how we can make regulations or tiers clearer. Most of the emails that I am getting—and I am sure that everyone else is getting—ask why one thing has closed but another thing is open. I certainly do not want to get into the same mess that Wales got into. People could not buy a kettle or certain other products—how daft was that? People want to participate, but quite rightly they ask for clarity and common sense.

Like others, I have been contacted by bingo operators. Bingo clubs in the central belt are currently closed, and I am informed that bingo clubs have had no Covid outbreaks. Regulatory bodies have made multiple visits, but no concerns have arisen. Bingo clubs operate with 2m social distancing, when everybody else is in the hospitality sector operates at 1m. They have certainly not seen any evidence that would justify a decision to close, and hopefully that will not come about.

I have been contacted by bowling centres, which are also under threat. They say that they are particularly socially distanced and should be allowed to open, as bowling centres in England are. They believe that they are in the wrong tier, and I would like to know why they are in that tier.

John asks why amateur football clubs currently prevented from playing. He says:

"We may well be placed in tier three, when others operating under the same protocols and strict guidelines are allowed to play, we are clearly of the opinion that Amateur Football has not been treated fairly"

He is asking that we do something about it."

Kel says:

"I run a wedding videography business based in your constituency and am writing for help in changing a seemingly small detail, which is currently in place in England, in the current restrictions for weddings in Scotland which would make a massive difference to our industry.

Personally, our income has been completely wiped out for 2020 and it now looks like this will be the case for most of 2021.

The detail I refer to is the fact that videographers are included in the restricted numbers of guests meaning that couples need to choose between having a very close family member as part of their already reduced numbers, or having a videographer and photographer at their wedding. This is resulting in couples going ahead with smaller weddings, but cancelling our services."

If that restriction could be changed, that would make a difference.

I have left the best till last. Again, I refer members to my entry in the register of interests. Showmen have not earned a penny since last March. They have fallen down for every fund that the Government has put up. They stand ready with PPE and cleaning materials, but they cannot use them. Councils are refusing to deal with them, due to Government guidance—or how they interpret that guidance.

**Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con):** Would the member agree that it is unfair that showmen's businesses are unable to qualify for Covid grants because their premises are not business rated?

**Richard Lyle:** I totally agree with that. Again, I make a plea that showmen need help. Level 2 states that cinemas and amusement arcades remain open—those are indoors, by the way. Why are outdoor funfairs in level 2? They are outdoors and should be treated as outdoors. I just do not get it. Funfairs are a fine example of why I would agree that we need to make regulations clear, concise and explainable, and we have to help funfairs financially. For the first time ever, there will be no funfairs in Scotland at any proposed Christmas market.

We must continue to refine the clarity of the regulations. We must continue to help all our citizens who have no income and no prospect of earning over the next few months, and I ask the Government to do that to the best of its ability.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Lewis Macdonald):** Jamie Greene will be the last speaker in the open debate.

18:09

**Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con):** I know that none of us wants to be having this debate. I have participated in almost every Covid-related debate since March. Nothing has irked me more during the pandemic than knowing that the voices of those most affected by the restrictions that we set have not always been heard. Some in my region were given just two days' notice to shut up shop for two weeks, which was then extended by another week. They have learned today that that could be indefinite.

My vote to grant the Government emergency powers did not grant consent to learn about new or extended restrictions via media speculation, press briefings, leaked documents or on social media, not least during recess. That is a job for Parliament.

I do not disagree with the essence of the new framework. I believe that ministers are working earnestly to tackle this awful virus and I thank them for that. However, people rightly expect transparency about the rationale and the thinking behind those decisions, because of the impact that they have on their lives.

The new tiered approach, if properly implemented and communicated, will recognise the diversity of our demographics, our population densities and, crucially, the differing rates of virus transmission. The real test of the framework will not be whether it commands the support of Parliament but whether it commands the support and confidence of the public.

Cafes, shops and bed and breakfasts in our regions and constituencies want to do the right thing to tackle the virus, but they also want to make a living, be part of thriving communities and offer job opportunities to our young people. Goodness knows that we need all those things now. Businesses must be confident, when the Government limits their ability to earn revenue, to grow, or even just to stay open, that those decisions are not taken lightly and that they will be consulted and supported. Those are reasonable demands.

People on Arran are asking me why their lives will be restricted if virus levels rise in Ardrossan. I have no justifiable answer to that question. Does the Government have one? If controlling human interaction is the primary tactic to suppress the virus, that will inevitably suppress the economy, too.

People deserve three simple things from us. The first is clarity of messaging about the tiers, rules and restrictions. The second is clarity about what support is available to them and how easily it can be accessed. Thirdly, they deserve clarity about the measurements that the Government will use to trigger the raising or lowering of those restrictions, and about how they move from one tier to another. Uncertainty and confusion are no one's friends in a pandemic.

Changes to guidance are welcome when they are sensible, such as those issued today covering childcare and early years, or the commitment to keep schools open. I hope that that is a positive sign of the Government's willingness to listen.

The Government must listen. Households have been unable to mix indoors for more than a month, and for longer in some places. Most people who

were asked to work from home are doing so. Most small businesses, including those in hospitality, have complied with social distancing since July. People are justified in asking us what is working and what is not, no matter how difficult or uncomfortable it is to answer those questions.

The need for action is undeniable. Yesterday there were 82 people with Covid-19 in intensive care units, up from six people in early September. We must all know and understand what drives that data. How many of those patients were admitted from care homes? How many were already in hospital and contracted the virus there? What does test and protect tell us about the source of those cases? More important, how do the answers to those questions justify the restrictions in other areas of life?

The problem is that if we cannot confidently and fluently answer those questions every day and week, our job of taking the public with us is made even more difficult.

By Christmas, many thousands of vulnerable people will have been shielding themselves from society for almost nine months. We all know someone who is in that boat. The University of Glasgow's Professor O'Connor said that the effects of lockdown would be long-lasting. That is an understatement; it is already having an effect.

I can best sum that up by referring to a conversation that I had recently with an elderly constituent. She blankly and bleakly told me that she would rather die of Covid if that meant that she could spend a few precious days with her grandchildren this Christmas, than spend the next year alone without them. How sad and how eye-opening is that? Christmas offers an opportunity for many to escape chronic loneliness. That is true whether someone is a pensioner or a pupil.

Today, I argue that it is our duty to leave no stone unturned in finding a solution to that conundrum: first, by testing through whatever means and on whatever scale is necessary; secondly, by offering clear guidance to people—students or otherwise—before, during and after the festive period; and thirdly, by treating people responsibly and with responsibility. We must know that the state cannot account for every situation in every family or manage every moment of every person's life.

The public need reassurance that the new road map, as opposed to any other incarnation of it, will actually work. This year, almost 80,000 women in Scotland have missed breast cancer screenings, and according to leading charities, there could already be hundreds of undiagnosed cases. Youth unemployment in Scotland now sits at 14.5 per cent, which is more than double what it was in February of this year. People out there are

scared—they are worried and tired—and I think that they need hope. We cannot tackle one health emergency by creating many others, either knowingly or even unwittingly. That is my biggest fear.

If we are truly in this for the long haul, we must be honest with people. We must be honest about the fact that we cannot and will not save every job or every life, or fix every problem. However, we can and we will listen, and sometimes that is all that people ask of their politicians. Today has been a good start; let us keep it up.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to the closing speeches.

18:16

**Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD):** So much has changed since the start of the year, and at such speed, that things have often felt very disorientating. It will take years for us to fully process everything that has happened, but it remains important to reflect and learn lessons as we go.

As other members have said, most people are trying to do the right thing. It took great sacrifice to bring levels of the virus down over the summer. The emotional and economic blows of the virus are terrible, but people understood that they were buying time. Without a vaccine, normal life hinges on the Government keeping its side of the deal. That is why it was so important to use that summer progress well. Regrettably, that did not happen. Problems were foreseen but not dealt with. It took four months for the Scottish Government to get quarantine spot checks up to the promised 20 per cent, and more than 1,000 travellers were lost in the process.

Students were treated shabbily. The spike in cases that came after they returned to campus was predictable and predicted. It was a scheduled mass migration. Nowhere near enough was done to keep students safe. I am glad that the Scottish Government is to look at asymptomatic testing for students, for which Willie Rennie has been making the case since July.

Scottish Liberal Democrats have sought to be a constructive Opposition during this pandemic. Where there have been problems, we have sought to offer solutions.

On that note, I hope that the Scottish Government will soon address the issues that vulnerable teachers are facing. Since August, many teachers have been telling the Government that the guidance does not reflect the realities of teaching. They feel as though they have just been expected to get on with it—vulnerable teachers have felt that especially. There have been reports

of teachers who had been shielding being given no work-from-home options. In Denmark, doctors' orders on working conditions have to be followed. That builds trust and ensures safety. The same needs to be done here.

People are craving certainty, stability and—as many members have mentioned—hope. We need a plan that can stand the test of time. There needs to be meaningful engagement with communities to understand their needs, and guidance needs to be provided on quarantining before operations and on the fact that the process of students returning home must involve public transport. The islands cannot be an afterthought.

It has taken a great community effort to keep the levels of the virus so low in Shetland. However, the rules on in-home socialising have weighed heavily on families and friends, and I know that that is replicated across the country. When the going gets tough, those support networks are often what get us through. Shetland has a harsh winter, and stopping people meeting inside at all will add further to feelings of anxiety, loneliness and isolation. If the Scottish Government is to continue to ask people in Shetland to keep to that rule, it needs to provide explicit evidence that shows that the Covid risk in Shetland continues to outweigh those social harms.

I hope that, in the wake of this debate, the Scottish Government is clear that its strategic framework needs to be part of a two-way conversation. If it wants to continue to bring people along with it, for the greater good, and for the health and safety of all of us, that is essential.

18:19

**Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** Like everybody else here, I hate what we have all been living through these past months. The basic reality of needing to stay apart from one another is horrible. I am sick of it; we all are, but we all also know how important it is that we continue to do what is necessary to save lives.

I welcome the fact that we have had this debate. It was regrettable that we divided on a matter of process rather than substance at the start of the day, but the debate has offered the opportunity for MSPs to make meaningful contributions on questions of substance, as I think most of our constituents want us to do. We should do that more often and allow these richer debates to happen.

There are issues of process that matter, and the Greens have sought to raise some of those issues in our amendment by offering constructive proposals, recognising that it takes effort to build political consensus. That does not happen by magic; we have to work at it, and it requires the

Government to do more—to share not just data and evidence but the expert scientific advice that it has and that the rest of us need if we are going to build that consensus. We also need to allow ourselves the opportunity to consider all the options that the Government is considering before it makes a policy proposal to the chamber, rather than scrutinising a policy proposal that has been decided on already.

However, such process issues are for inside these walls; most people outside want us to focus on the substance, and one of the most important matters of substance that many members have talked about today is the role of routine, regular, asymptomatic testing. As Alison Johnstone said, we have been keen to push on that since this business began. Obviously, social care and healthcare settings are important places for that approach to begin. The nosocomial review group decided, about a month ago, to base its testing strategy on the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control approach. That seems to suggest, at least on paper, that throughout health and social care there should be regular, routine, asymptomatic testing. As we have heard from a number of members, that is not the day-to-day experience on the ground everywhere, but it needs to become that, now that it is the strategy on paper. The approach has wider application and Unite hospitality has been making the case for the same approach to testing in hospitality settings. As retail settings come higher up the list of places where people who tested positive had been circulating, we should look at that as well.

Our amendment also talks about further and higher education settings, and I draw members' attention to the Educational Institute of Scotland's view on schools. We know that, across the country, social distancing is not happening in schools and teachers are deeply concerned that their health is being put at risk in confined spaces. The restrictions at level 4 of the new system are parallel to those that, in many other countries, including other nations in the UK, are triggering school closures. I agree that we should try to avoid school closures if at all possible and keep schools open if it is safe to do so, but teachers, as well as pupils and families, need to have clarity about what the conditions would be in the future if closures, even for short periods of time, became necessary. The Scottish Government should publish evidence and advice on the decision that has been made about keeping schools open at level 4 and what future decisions could be made.

I will briefly touch on the Labour and Liberal Democrat amendments, which add something positive and constructive. I would have been able to vote for both of them, but the Labour amendment, I regret to say, removes too much that is valuable in the original motion. Like Richard

Leonard, I would love to have all the information that we could about how many people contracted the virus in pubs compared with restaurants, but we simply cannot have that information. We can have the information about where people who tested positive have been, but it is not possible to know precisely where they contracted the virus. The information that we have available can be used as a basis for deciding how best to reduce social mixing, because that is what we must do.

I turn to the Conservative amendment, which also removes too much from the motion. I recognise the requirement to have the voice of business heard in relation to how we implement, communicate and mitigate restrictions. However, if the Government is going to take Ruth Davidson's proposal seriously, there needs to be a clear distinction between that kind of advice and the advice on where restrictions are necessary, which must be led principally by public health expertise. We know that, as well as many responsible businesses, there are those that are putting their business interests ahead of the health and safety of their workforce and customers, as I put to Mr Ewing earlier.

I know that I have run over time. Clearly, this is an unprecedented situation with unprecedented powers given to ministers. There is now an expectation that we start to shift some of that power back from the Government towards the Parliament. However, if we are going to do that, the Parliament needs to have access to the information as well as the expert advice that the Government has, and it will require a level of responsibility from us all.

I commend the amendment in Alison Johnstone's name.

18:26

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** I welcome the opportunity to participate in the debate.

I will start by talking about the simplicity of the message, because we know that simplicity is important in ensuring compliance. I am genuinely worried that the framework is complex. We have gone from a four-phase strategic route map to five tiers of a framework that is numbered from 0 to 4; a complex basket of indicators to determine which tier each local area is in; a lack of clarity about the length of time that the approach might apply for and what flexibilities might apply in exercising judgment. I do get, though, that being more targeted does increase complexity; there is a fine balance to be struck.

I am concerned, however, that compliance is reducing. That has to worry us. A recent survey told us that only 27 per cent of people fully understand the guidance. Not very many could tell

you what FACTS stands for, despite the First Minister's herculean efforts. In that case, the UK Government is marginally better; even I can remember hands, face and space. We all agree that for the public to be able to follow those messages and to keep themselves and others safe, we need clarity on what they are being asked to do. I welcome the postcode checker, but we need to go further.

Common sense, consistency and clarity are essential if we are to take people with us. Richard Leonard was right to acknowledge the frustration that people feel, whether it is individuals who are separated from families or unable to see loved ones in care homes, or indeed businesses that are in danger of making staff redundant or closing for good.

For people to buy into restrictions, they need to understand what underpins the approach. We have talked about data, but we need to see the scientific evidence. I welcome the commentary from the chief medical officer and the national clinical director. They have an important role to play but are not the scientific experts.

The Scottish Government set up a Scottish equivalent of the scientific advisory group for emergencies—SAGE. I welcome that, but we do not know what that body thinks, because its papers are not published. We need to see that evidence, because if we want to improve compliance, we need to improve understanding. That means that the scientific evidence needs to be published. I know that the First Minister said that she would consider that, but I genuinely believe that if we treat people like adults, they will respond in kind.

**The Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans (Graeme Dey):** The member talks about the need for clarity. Could she clarify on behalf of Labour where the party stands on the Government motion seeking the Parliament to note, rather than endorse, the plan? Earlier, Elaine Smith criticised the “noting” approach, yet in the lead-up to the debate, it was Scottish Labour that asked the Government to take that approach. I am confused. Could Jackie Baillie end my confusion?

**Jackie Baillie:** I think that it was interesting that people were criticised earlier for talking about process instead of substance. I think that Graeme Dey is trying to take us back there. My understanding is that there was a discussion between special advisers and not politicians; at the end of the day, what matters is what is said in the chamber.

Can I also make a plea for geographical guidance? In constituencies such as mine that straddle two local authority areas, people are used to working and socialising across local boundaries.

One of my areas is tier 2, as I read it; the other is likely to be tier 3. Understanding what you can do to allow you to plan your life accordingly is going to be quite important. At the start of the most recent restrictions, thousands of people ignored the First Minister's injunction to stay in their health board area, and it seemed that all of them ended up in Helensburgh. I am curious to know how that will be handled in the five-tier framework, because the travel restrictions are not entirely clear. There were real problems with travel restrictions previously, and that, coupled with the closure of car parks and toilets by national parks, Forestry and Land Scotland and councils, caused chaos. I ask the First Minister whether we can avoid that chaos occurring again.

**The First Minister:** This is a genuine question, and I am genuinely interested in the answer: is Jackie Baillie arguing that we should not give advice on travel restrictions, or is she arguing that that advice should be put in law and become much more enforceable?

When Richard Leonard and I spoke about it a few weeks ago, I think that the view—this is not a criticism—was that travel restrictions were not a good thing, so which way does Labour want us to go? It is a genuine question, and I am genuinely interested in the answer.

**Jackie Baillie:** It is one that I would happily reflect on with local businesses in my constituency, because what we saw was that the train from Glasgow to Helensburgh was suddenly mobbed and the hospitality industry was overwhelmed. I am happy to discuss that issue; there is not an easy answer, but those were the very real problems, and the closure of toilets and car parks were part of it. I am glad that the First Minister understands the problems and I am happy to help her work on a solution that works for business.

Let me turn to the impact on business, and in particular hospitality and tourism businesses. The overwhelming majority of hospitality and retail businesses have been following the rules. They do so in part because it is required of them, but also because they want their customers to feel confident in returning to their premises. They care about their customers, and they also care about their staff. Restaurants, pubs and hotels are in danger of closing down, and that would result in huge job losses. They cannot operate on the basis of a two-week temporary lockdown that is extended without notice to 2 November and is likely to be extended even further. They cannot begin to plan for the future.

Consultation with business is essential. I echo the earlier point that groups such as Scottish Chambers of Commerce, FSB Scotland, the Scottish Retail Consortium and umbrella



organisations in hospitality and tourism all want to help to arrive at solutions. I hope that the First Minister will engage their expertise on an on-going basis.

We must also align restrictions with financial support. I agree that the UK Government needs to step up to do more, but I also expect the Scottish Government to work with it and to use the money in the Scottish Government's budget that is currently unallocated to start the process of ensuring that there is adequate business support.

Let me tell the chamber that today, a hotel in my constituency told me that it had been rejected for assistance from the business closure fund, because the Scottish Government said that hotels were not eligible for it. Why? Hotels are having to close too. Why is the First Minister not looking at that again? As we approach the busy Christmas period, which matters to the hospitality and retail sectors, I hope that the Scottish Government will balance health concerns with economic concerns.

I want to cover a couple of things very quickly. The strategic framework does not specifically mention learning disabilities, and I associate myself with Joan McAlpine's remarks on that issue. Several key points have been made to me by members of Enable. First, there needs to be easy-read guidance on the new tier levels. Secondly, there is anxiety among people with learning disabilities when they see people flouting the rules and they do not know who to contact to enforce those rules. Lastly, there is a lack of local community opportunities—that view is widely shared.

I will finish by talking about test and protect. I welcome the expansion of testing. Home care workers in my constituency who work for the local authority are not routinely tested. In fact, some are not tested at all and they work with older vulnerable people. We need regular, routine, asymptomatic testing. We are not testing enough people, yet we have the capacity to do so. We do not have enough contact tracers, and that is reflected in the decline of the numbers who are traced within 72 hours.

When I raised that with the First Minister, she told me that there was not a problem, there was nothing to see, and that contact tracers deserve our thanks. They absolutely do, but they also deserve to have enough colleagues to make their workload manageable. They deserve to have the resources to deal with the challenge that they face. We need to learn from countries that have suppressed the spread of the virus because they have more comprehensive and more robust testing and tracing systems in place. We have one of the worst testing rates in the UK and one of the worst death rates, not just in the UK but in the world. We simply cannot afford to be complacent.

Finally, I have no doubt that winter will be tough for the front-line staff who care for us, for the businesses that are forced to close, and for individuals and families, and a vaccine cannot come quick enough. I hope that the Scottish Government will put in place a vaccination strategy very quickly indeed.

18:36

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I am grateful for the opportunity to close for the Scottish Conservatives in what has, rightly, been an important debate, especially because it has offered the opportunity for greater scrutiny of the Scottish Government's intentions. That will be very warmly welcomed by the public at large, never mind by the Parliament, for exactly the reasons that Alex Neil and Jamie Greene spoke about.

I join Jackie Baillie in saying—and we cannot say it often enough—that we must thank all our front-line and key workers, particularly those in the NHS and social services, who, as we know, are once again under increasing pressure.

As Ruth Davidson remarked in her opening speech, this is an unprecedented challenge. The decisions are therefore undoubtedly extremely tough. However, it is also an unpredictable challenge for the reasons that Kenny Gibson cited in his speech. Can we therefore pay tribute to all the people who have worked so hard behind the scenes—unsung heroes in many cases—and to all the businesses across Scotland that have had to adapt significantly to meet the challenge of reducing the spread of Covid-19?

As we have learned more about the virus and about how we have to adapt to it, many of our businesses have had to do that at significant cost, in terms of expense and time, and many business owners face continued uncertainty. I will come back to that point in just a moment.

The Scottish Conservatives have made it clear that we welcome some elements of the Scottish Government's motion and, indeed, several aspects of its framework. We note that the tiering system will be applied by local authority area rather than by health board area, and we welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to consult local authorities and health boards on the application of the framework to individual areas. Those are extremely welcome changes in approach that will go a long way towards reducing a lot of the confusion.

We also acknowledge the Scottish Government's commitment to continue to build and enhance the test and protect system and to aim to deliver 65,000 tests a day by the winter. Indeed, we welcome the expansion of lab capacity through the proposed regional hubs in NHS

Grampian, NHS Lothian, and NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, as well as through commercial and partner routes. I also think that the new app, which the First Minister announced today, will be very helpful in identifying some postcode regulations.

With that in mind, however, we also note that the Scottish Government's review of its testing strategy has recommended faster test turnaround times, stating:

"in considering the principles of the Testing Strategy, our advice is there should be greater focus on the importance of fast turnaround times, so that testing achieves its intended purpose of reducing transmission by enabling prompt contact tracing and isolation of potentially infectious close contacts."

That is particularly important in the light of the growing evidence—some of which we saw this morning—that antibody immunity might not last as long as we previously thought it would, particularly among the older population, and the fact that caution has been expressed in some medical journals about the value of some data on negative testing.

Above all else, we recognise that there is a need for a system of measures that are straightforward, easily understood, flexible and able to help to reduce the spread of the virus with as limited a social and economic impact as possible. However, as my colleagues have expressed throughout the debate, we have concerns.

Many have rightly been critical of the SNP Government for its failure to supply the full evidence behind the decisions on recent measures, and that has become a bit of a theme through much of the pandemic. Professor Hugh Pennington recently noted his frustrations at

"the low level of information about outbreaks and the evidence that is being used"

to support the closure of some businesses.

Although more information has been made available today, more clarity is still needed about the methodology that has led to the creation of the five-tier system. We are somewhere along the road, but any clarity that we can get about the methodology would be hugely welcome. For example, Glasgow, North Lanarkshire, South Lanarkshire, West Dunbartonshire, East Dunbartonshire, Renfrewshire and East Renfrewshire council areas have all been subject to restrictions on household movements for more than two months now, but we do not know whether that has been effective in suppressing the virus, because the SNP Government has not published the full data on that. The First Minister's advisers have told her that there is a question about the data.

**The First Minister:** I am absolutely committed to providing as much data as possible. We probably provide more detail than many other countries do, and we want to enhance that. If Liz Smith can point to any pieces of data that are being provided in other parts of the UK that are not being provided here, I will look at those. However, I suspect that she will not find any, because some of the data that is being called for, on a scientific basis, simply does not yet exist.

**Liz Smith:** People such as Hugh Pennington are making the case that, to have public trust, which is essential when dealing with the virus in order to ensure that there is compliance, it is absolutely essential to have the data that goes with the methodology in order to back up the measures that the Government wants to put in place. There is an issue of transparency.

We do not know whether there is evidence to support the closure of licensed premises across the central belt. That is another issue about the methodology and the evidence. As members from across the chamber have said, if we are to make the changes, some of which might be absolutely admirable and sensible, it is crucial to have the methodology in order to ensure that the public agree and comply with those changes.

**The First Minister:** As I said, Liz Smith or any other member can come to us with requests for specific data that exists, but, across the UK right now, hospitality is closed in many parts of England and it is closed completely in Wales and Northern Ireland, yet I am not aware of any of those Governments providing any greater level of data and evidence than we are, because we are all providing as much as exists. However, if there are examples of something being provided elsewhere that we are not providing, I am happy to look at those.

**Liz Smith:** One reason why the First Minister is getting some knock-back from the business community and one reason why the Scottish Conservatives are asking for greater transparency on the issue and for the business community to be involved is that people need to understand the reasons for and evidence to support the decisions that the Scottish Government is making. That is what is being asked for, and that is what we are keen for the Government to produce.

Thousands of Scottish businesses have had huge benefit from the UK's investment. I have heard the cries from the SNP that there should be endless support from the UK Government. We have heard time and again that we cannot stop the furlough scheme or this, that and the next thing. However, there is no endless pot of money. I urge the SNP to understand that, time after time, the UK Government has put its hand in its pockets to provide a huge amount of financial support, which

otherwise would not have been possible. Therefore, the criticism that the SNP is levelling at the UK Government is unnecessary and we cannot support it.

I am conscious of the time, but I want to raise a couple of other issues before I finish. I strongly believe that, over the next few weeks, in the lead up to the Christmas period, when anxieties, fears and concerns about what the future holds will inevitably increase, we need to be clear about what we can support. It is important that people in Scotland know exactly what Parliament will have to do to scrutinise the Scottish Government's decisions. I accept what the Labour Party has said on this, but scrutiny is essential because it helps us to understand the process of decision making, methodology and the important reasons why people should do what they are being asked to do. I will finish on this point because I think it is one of the most important points. We cannot expect public trust and compliance unless we are crystal clear about the instructions that we are giving to people in all the different parts of the country and unless they know that those decisions have been based on clear evidence and clear thinking that they can accept.

I support the amendment in the name of Ruth Davidson and thank members for their time.

18:46

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman):** I start by expressing my gratitude to members across the chamber for their contributions this afternoon, as we shape Scotland's strategic response to dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic through the next phases.

As the First Minister reported earlier, we have today seen the loss of 25 more of our fellow citizens to the virus. That means that 25 families are in mourning for a loved one. They have our sincere condolences.

At its core, reducing the impact of the virus is about preventing further loss of life. However, it is also about preventing the long-term health impacts for many people who become infected with Covid-19. There are 1,100 Covid-19-positive people in hospital just now and, of those, 82 are in ICU. There are also people who are now enduring long Covid; we know about them and we are reading more about them every day. They will testify to the impact of surviving Covid then enduring long Covid.

The rise in the number of cases recently in Scotland is cause for considerable concern, but we are seeing signs of improvement, and we contend that the steps that we introduced in September have prevented the scale of acceleration that we have seen elsewhere in

Europe. As the First Minister outlined, in shaping the new levels, we have consulted a range of stakeholders since we published the outline on Friday. Clearly, we cannot make every change that we are asked to make without reducing the intended impact of the restrictions at different levels, but as the First Minister said earlier, we have acted where we believed we could.

That leads me to an important point about judgment and balance that I will return to, in closing the debate. As health secretary, I am acutely aware, as winter begins, that the challenge of Covid-19 will sorely test our health service, so I cannot proceed with my closing speech without thanking, from the bottom of my heart, our health and social care staff for everything that they have done during the past nine to 10 months, and for everything that we will ask them to continue to do.

**Jamie Greene:** What percentage of the unfortunate and sad deaths that are due to Covid are currently occurring in care homes? Seven months into the pandemic, what lessons have been learned about how we manage the rise in the number of cases in our care homes? What will the Government do during the winter that will be different to what it has done in the past seven months?

**Jeane Freeman:** The answer to the first part of that question is in the statistics that are published every week by National Records of Scotland.

On what we will do to prepare and what lessons we have learned, I will shortly set out in the chamber the winter preparedness plan for adult social care, as a follow-on to what I intend to do tomorrow in respect of the NHS. I hope that we can have a constructive debate about that, and that what I say will give Jamie Greene some assurance not only about lessons learned, but about how we are applying them.

The five-level framework has been made with protecting our health service firmly in mind—to protect our NHS from being overwhelmed, to save lives and to continue to deliver healthcare as safely as we can. We do not want to go back to the situation in which we had to pause significant areas of healthcare in our NHS in order to deal with the first phase of the pandemic, but we will decide not to pause those areas of healthcare only if we are successful in reducing the prevalence of the virus.

Our aim is to allow a more proportionate response, through which areas of the country with very low levels of transmission do not have to live under the same restrictions as areas that are experiencing very high levels of transmission. It is clear that, with that, comes the challenge of helping people to see and understand the level that is in place in their area.

I completely agree with Mr Sarwar and others; the communication challenge simply gets more difficult the more we try to address in a proportionate way our response to the pandemic. I am therefore pleased that members have welcomed the new postcode checker service, which will help to do exactly that and will explain the restrictions that are in place where people are, tailored to their area.

**Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** The cabinet secretary said that the restriction levels in each area will reflect effectively the level of Covid cases in that area, so the approach will be more locally tailored. However, the First Minister said earlier that, when we move into the new regime, local areas will have levels of restrictions that are similar to those that they currently have. That means, for example, that the Scottish Borders—the Scottish Borders is being told this—will be at level 2. However, if we look at the criteria that the Government has published today, we see that, in respect of four out of five of the indicators, the Scottish Borders is at level 0, and that it is at level 1 in the fifth one. Based on the Scottish Government's own criteria, it is nowhere near level 2. How can we get adherence from the public if we are asking them to adhere to a level that is seen to be unfair?

**Jeane Freeman:** Colin Smyth will recall that the First Minister set out very clearly that we will look at actual and projected cases, test-positivity rates and projections for hospital and ICU capacities, and then make a judgment. It was also said clearly that, in applying the tiers in the framework in the first instance, we will apply precaution and caution.

I am sure that Colin Smyth recalls that we have also said that we will look every week at where local authorities will be in all those levels, and that we will make changes where we see consolidated progress. However, in moving from where we are now to the five levels, it makes sense to take a precautionary approach.

As the First Minister set out, our levels 1, 2 and 3 have been designed to be similar to the three levels that are in place in England. Although it is clear that our level 4 is closer to lockdown, it is not a full lockdown, which we saw in March. Should Parliament give its broad agreement to the framework today, we will set out on Thursday the level at which each local authority area will be set, as of Monday, which will be kept under weekly review.

Our actions are focused in such a way that, in the coming weeks, the rate of growth in new cases will, we hope, continue to slow. That would allow council areas potentially to drop down levels, in time. It is clear that we want to get to a position in which all Scotland is at level 1 and, ultimately, at level 0. We achieved exceptionally low levels of

infection over the summer, and we want that again.

As members have said, testing is important not on its own, but as part of an overall package of measures to help us to suppress the virus. Over the next few weeks, our capacity will grow to 65,000 tests a day. In addition to continuing testing of care home staff, we will look to test others regularly, and we have begun our planning to map additional groups—as our clinical and professional paper sets out, that action is designed to protect the most vulnerable people—against scale-up of that testing. We will keep members in touch with that work, and we are open to discussion about it.

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** Will the cabinet secretary tell us when she will test care-at-home workers? I have constituents who have care workers coming into their homes but they are not being tested, at the moment.

**Jeane Freeman:** I understand, and I have just said that we are planning how to map the scale-up of additional capacity against the groups that we will bring into asymptomatic regular testing, and when to set the date at which all those groups will begin testing. I am open to discussing that with members, and to taking on board their particular views. However, as the member will have read in the paper that we published on Friday, care-at-home staff are one of the additional cohorts that we want to bring into asymptomatic regular testing precisely because it is about protecting the most vulnerable people.

Test and protect is a vital part of our defence. Those who are involved in our test and protect program deserve our thanks and recognition, so it is vital that I clarify, for the record, what some members have asserted. Between 21 September and 18 October, when case numbers were rising, 91 per cent of positive cases were successfully completed to interview within 48 hours. Within that, 74.7 per cent were successfully completed within 24 hours. I think that that is a system that is working; as well as thanking those who work in that service, we should recognise what they are achieving.

Before I finish, I turn to the question of scrutiny. I repeat that we welcome scrutiny, questions and the debate. That is exactly how we all learn—no one in this chamber has a monopoly on good ideas. However, we do that in the context of a virus that does not respect rules and procedures. With a doubling time of 10 to 15 days, the desire and intent for greater scrutiny must be matched by a recognition of the need for pace, and of the need and responsibility of the Government to act quickly and to be accountable. As the First Minister has set out, we have proposals to get to a better place the balance of proper scrutiny, increased scrutiny

and pace, so we will continue to engage across the chamber to agree how that can be achieved.

I do not have time in responding to do justice to every contribution and point that members have made. As the First Minister has said, although we cannot vote for all the amendments, because two of them seek to remove parts of our motion that we think are important, we will look at all the proposals in all the amendments and will seek to consider them fully and, where we can, to take them on board.

I will make two final points before I finish. First, on data, I absolutely understand—

**Neil Findlay:** Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

**Jeane Freeman:** I am afraid that I need to finish.

**Neil Findlay:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I am trying to be helpful, because this is important. The cabinet secretary referred to amendments, but did not say which amendments the Government will accept. It would be helpful for members to know that.

**The Presiding Officer:** That is not a point of order, but a point for the cabinet secretary.

**Jeane Freeman:** I will happily tell the member that we cannot accept the Labour or the Conservative amendments, but will accept the amendments from the Liberal Democrats and the Greens.

I want to talk about data; I need to repeat that I completely understand why people want to see more data. The fact is, however, that some of the things that people are asking for simply do not exist. We cannot make data up. I carry around two full sides of A4 that contain, in closely typed lines, all the data that we publish weekly, daily and monthly. The difficulty for us all is not the data that we publish. It is in being able to triangulate, understand and apply it, and to recognise that, in dealing with the virus, political judgment, on top of good clinical and scientific advice—in the context of a virus that the world is learning about, therefore our understanding and knowledge change constantly—mean that we do not have binary choices, where we might quite like to have binary choices. They are simply not there for us.

We face a serious situation, but it is a less severe situation than many other countries face—not only in the United Kingdom, but across Europe. That is partly because, collectively, we suppressed the virus to a very low level over the summer. That has been because of the effectiveness of the test and protect system and our health staff, in particular. We are not in the least complacent about that, but our situation right now would be worse, if we had not done that.

There has been a lot of talk today about hope. I firmly believe in the importance of hope. Actually, I believe in the power of hope, and I think that we can draw hope from what we have achieved so far, from the lessons that we have learned and applied in the past nine months, from the dedication of our NHS and social care staff, from the expertise of clinicians and scientists here and globally and from the efforts of people across the country.

This pandemic challenges us every day, but working together, not without debate and disagreement and certainly not without argument, we can get through it. Every single one of us in the chamber has to be an advocate for a strategy and an approach that puts lives first and recognises what we need to do to mitigate other harms, and through which we work collectively and with strength to get Scotland through the pandemic.

**Elaine Smith:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. *[Interruption.]* Once the groans die down, I will make my point of order.

Before we turn to the vote on the motion, can we clarify that, although the cabinet secretary talked about Parliament broadly agreeing, we are noting the Government's new strategy, not endorsing it? It is important to make that point prior to voting.

**The Presiding Officer:** Again, that is a point of argument or debate; it is not a point of procedure for me to rule on.

That concludes our debate on "COVID-19: Scotland's Strategic Framework".

## Decision Time

19:02

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** The first question is, that amendment S5M-23133.4, in the name of Ruth Davidson, which seeks to amend motion S5M-23133, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on “COVID-19: Scotland’s Strategic Framework”, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division. As members know, we have to suspend the meeting for a short period to allow all members in the chamber and those online to access the voting app.

19:02

*Meeting suspended.*

19:10

*On resuming—*

**The Presiding Officer:** We move straight to the vote.

We will check the results and leave a few moments for members who do not think that they voted to let us know.

### For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)  
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)  
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (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)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Graham, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (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)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)

Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 50, Against 69, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S5M-23133.2, in the name of Richard Leonard, which seeks to amend the motion in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

We will take a few moments to allow members who think that they have not voted to let us know.

#### For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)  
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)

Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)  
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

#### Against

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)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (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)  
 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)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)

McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

#### Abstentions

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 54, Against 64, Abstentions 1.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S5M-23133.3, in the name of Alison Johnstone, which seeks to amend the motion in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, be agreed to.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S5M-23133.1, in the name of Willie Rennie, which seeks to amend the motion in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, be agreed to.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The final question is, that motion S5M-23133, in the name of Nicola Sturgeon, on "COVID-19: Scotland's Strategic Framework", as amended, be agreed to.

*Motion, as amended, agreed to.*

That the Parliament notes the publication of COVID-19: Scotland's Strategic Framework, which sets out the intended approach to managing the suppression of COVID-19 across Scotland in the coming months; further notes that local NHS boards and local authorities will be consulted on the application of the framework to individual areas; acknowledges the basket of measures that will be considered with data published on decisions; further acknowledges that the Framework takes account of the direct harm that COVID-19 causes as well as the health, social and economic harms that result from the pandemic and the protective measures that have to be put in place; notes the increased support for self-isolation and compliance, the continued support for communities and for individuals, including for mental health, the projected increase in testing capacity and the commitment to increasing routine asymptomatic testing, as well as a

commitment to continue to build and enhance the Test and Protect system; further notes the commitment to keeping schools open at all levels and the economic package put in place to support those businesses that may be required to close or have their operations restricted; calls on the UK Government to enable the Scottish Government to make the same open-ended commitment to funding businesses in Scotland as has been made in England and to improve the support for wages, particularly for low-income workers who may be hardest hit by any necessary restrictions, in order to support people and businesses to comply; believes that the ultimate goal must be elimination of COVID-19; recognises that the expansion of asymptomatic testing will play an important role in this endeavour, including in higher and further education settings; considers that a coherent response to the ongoing pandemic requires effort to build political consensus, and that, in addition to formal parliamentary scrutiny, this must include greater sharing of the Scottish Government's scientific advice with opposition parties and civil society, opportunities for discussion of all policy options under consideration rather than only finalised proposals, and proactive efforts to identify known challenges ahead as well as responding to events as they happen; believes that additional capacity is urgently needed within Test and Protect, in light of the low level of quarantine spot-checks and long waits for interviews by contact tracers, alongside the extra demand that will be generated by the new routine asymptomatic testing required to protect groups, including students, and calls on the Scottish Government to provide communities with fairness, clarity and hope by sharing the criteria and thresholds for their moving up and down between the levels of restrictions, and the data that will underpin these decisions.



## Student Paramedics (Bursary Support)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame):** The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-22506, in the name of Liam McArthur, on paying student paramedics. The debate will conclude without any question being put.

### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament notes the campaign to introduce bursary support for student paramedics from Orkney and across Scotland; appreciates the pivotal role that paramedics have played in meeting the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, and that student paramedics have stepped up at a time of great need; acknowledges that student paramedics, unlike student nurses and midwives, currently have no access to a bursary scheme to support them during their degree course; notes that the campaign has been started by a group of student paramedics to highlight this discrepancy and press for equivalent funding to be made available to all Scottish student paramedics; understands that student paramedics are expected to work the same hours as a fully qualified paramedics and therefore have limited time to take on additional work to fund their studies; believes that the lack of financial support discourages many young people, particularly those from low-income families, from considering a career as a paramedic; understands that the Pay Student Paramedics campaign has highlighted that, last year, the Scottish Ambulance Service was unable to cover 42,000 shifts; further understands that there were calls on the Scottish Government to do more to widen access to this key profession within Scotland's health service by offering financial assistance to trainee paramedics through a bursary scheme, and believes that this would be fair recognition of the contribution that paramedics make to the NHS.

19:18

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** I thank colleagues who signed my motion to enable the debate to take place. In particular, I thank those who have stuck around at the end of a very long day in order to participate. I very much look forward to hearing what they and the Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing have to say.

One of the key lessons of the current pandemic is that life is fragile. Good health cannot be taken for granted. At a time of crisis, particularly when circumstances are generally more challenging, there is comfort from knowing that help, if we need it, is only a phone call away. We are fortunate in being able to rely on a committed and skilled healthcare workforce that is trained to deal with most eventualities and is ready to pick up the pieces of whatever life throws at us.

Nobody starts their day thinking that they will need a paramedic, but many finish the day very glad that they were there. Paramedics are the front line of the front line: they are everybody's safety net. It is right, therefore, that we expect

paramedics to undergo extensive, rigorous and meticulous training—not just in the classroom, but at the coalface, hands on and under supervision.

I therefore support the move to require student paramedics to complete a BSc in paramedic science. It makes sense. It provides confidence to the public, but it also offers reassurance to those who are looking to embark on such a career that they will be well prepared. Five universities in Scotland now offer that relatively new qualification, while traditional in-house training is being phased out.

When the country went into lockdown, earlier this year, students on those courses stepped up to the plate, putting themselves at risk in the face of a virus that was both highly infectious and potentially fatal. In return, however, student paramedics have not been treated fairly by the Scottish Government. While the demands on them have increased substantially, the support that is available remains woefully inadequate.

Earlier this year, my constituent Megan Nicholson wrote to me, explaining that her course is 50 per cent placement work—"the same hours as a fully qualified paramedic". That work is unpaid and amounts to around 2,500 hours. However, as Megan points out, the course follows shift placements that are constantly chopping and changing and that can run well into the summer, making it difficult—if not impossible—to pick up paid part-time employment at the same time.

Student nurses and midwives are in much the same boat. In recognition of their situation, however, they now receive a national health service bursary of up to £10,000 a year to help them with their living costs. That is right, and it ensures that cost—or, at least, the prospect of racking up significant debt—does not act as a barrier to those who are looking to train as a nurse or a midwife.

By contrast, student paramedics are expected to support themselves with just the standard Student Awards Agency Scotland loan. The more limited financial support that is available is also repayable, unlike the NHS bursary. Even in the short term, the loan payments can leave student paramedics with as little as £25 a week to survive on, once their rent has been paid.

None of that is news to the Government. Ministers are well aware of the problem and the risks that it creates to future staffing levels on the front line of our national health service. So far, though, sympathy and a review are all that have been offered. However, warm words and expressions of appreciation from ministers—including the First Minister, with whom I raised the issue back in August—do nothing to alleviate the

plight that is currently faced by so many paramedics.

Not for nothing was the report that was published by the campaign group Pay Student Paramedics entitled “Student Paramedics on the Poverty Line”. The key finding of that survey was that many student paramedics are living below the poverty line, with some actually “destitute”. That conclusion alone should have shamed the Government into action. When coupled with the evidence, which is highlighted in the same survey, that many students are working in excess of what is allowed under the working time regulations, ministers really have no excuse.

The campaign concludes that some students are having to rely on food banks to feed themselves. If that were the result of actions—or inaction—by the United Kingdom Government, Scottish National Party ministers would be expressing outrage. The mix of indignation and condemnation would have some colleagues reaching for the defibrillator. Yet the report’s findings are the result of the SNP Government’s inaction. Those dire conditions have arisen on the SNP Government’s watch, and the power to put things right rests with the SNP Government.

By condemning aspiring NHS staff to the breadline, the Scottish ministers are jeopardising the future of the paramedic workforce, which is already creaking under the strain. In 2019, the Scottish Government put paramedics on its shortage occupation list, and we know, from official figures that were published in January, that the Scottish Ambulance Service failed to cover 43,000 shifts. Last year, a UNISON report revealed that the workload had increased across the board, with 83 per cent of staff saying that their workload was “much heavier”. Sickness absence across the service rose by 40 per cent in 2018 and is currently the third-highest across the respective health boards.

In that context, the Scottish Government’s failure to properly support those who are looking to pursue a career as a paramedic not only is inexplicable but borders on negligent.

I see that at a local level, in Orkney. Currently, the entire Orkney mainland and linked isles are covered by a single land ambulance, save possibly for a few hours on Friday and Saturday evenings. That is simply inadequate. Not only does it put strain on existing ambulance staff, who do their best to provide the cover that their community needs, often by agreeing to be called out when they are not on shift; it also places an unfair and potentially unsafe burden on out-of-hours general practitioners. I know that NHS Orkney has real concerns about the number of times that GPs have been called to attend incidents, including some for which they are not

adequately trained. That cannot be allowed to continue.

Despite the willingness of Scottish Ambulance Service and NHS Orkney staff to go above and beyond, the minister acknowledged to me in a recent parliamentary answer that, in the 12 months leading to December 2019, there had been 168 occasions on which emergency calls in Orkney were left waiting due to the ambulance responding to another call. There was also an occasion when Orkney was, in effect, left without any ambulance cover for two hours. That is clearly unacceptable and unsustainable.

I would expect the demand and capacity review that is currently under way to expose that shortfall. It will then be for ministers to respond positively and with the required urgency to ensure that Orkney gets the additional capacity that it so obviously needs.

However, the whole situation is made no easier by the failure to properly support the pipeline of new recruits into the service. That is why the pay student paramedics campaign is so timely, and I thank the people involved for their efforts to shine a light on the issue. It is also why it is so important that ministers now listen and act, and I look forward to hearing confirmation from Mr FitzPatrick that that is what he intends to do.

19:25

**Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** I congratulate Liam McArthur on securing this evening’s debate on a subject that is important not just in Orkney but right across Scotland. It is particularly important to rural areas such as the one that I represent. I express my unreserved support for the sentiment of the motion, without necessarily agreeing with every word that Liam McArthur said.

I will start by making the point that we must recognise the immense stress that paramedics face. In some ways, I am an amateur—over the years, I have attended road accidents on three occasions simply through being present by accident. On one of those occasions, there were two fatalities. Therefore, on a tiny level, I understand some of the pressure that the young people concerned are under.

In the ordinary world, the stress on the profession is significant, but in the current circumstances it is even higher. That is compounded by the fact that we are talking about students rather than people who are fully qualified, seasoned veterans of many years’ experience or people who have learned to cope with and face situations that most people would struggle with. They are at the beginning of their career journey and are only beginning to build the personal

resilience that they will need throughout their time as paramedics.

The stress that comes with the profession is augmented by the stresses of student life, which include the demands of having to learn and to pass exams. As we heard from Liam McArthur, student paramedics' placement activity causes disruption because it is not neatly fitted in with the learning activities that they must undertake and the need that many students have to earn some outside income to supplement their student means. In addition, like others in the profession, they will experience loneliness, overwork and a degree of uncertainty, and they will do so to a much greater extent in the era of Covid-19.

Despite that, there are people up and down Scotland who are working courageously on the front line with the emergency services during the current pandemic. They are doing so on a full-time basis, near enough, and they are unpaid. They are essential, front-line staff in the pandemic.

Are there ramifications of that? Others have suggested that student paramedics are given a hard choice between doing additional jobs and living in poverty. In either case, that is a source of considerable stress. How might they respond to that? We might lose some of them to other careers. That would be deeply regrettable, and we do not want that to happen. Is there competition for jobs at the moment? Yes, there is, but that is no excuse for approaching the issue in a way that could be considered to be exploitative.

All those factors are important considerations in enabling people to stay in the profession and progress their professional qualification, and in encouraging others to come and join them in the role. The Ambulance Service has suffered from a shortage of paramedics. Liam McArthur talked about Orkney being left without an ambulance for two hours. The geography of the north-east of Scotland is such that that area, too, can be without an ambulance for two hours, because if the single ambulance in Banff, my nearest town, has gone to Aberdeen, it will be away for that length of time. The problems of island communities are ones that other communities are familiar with.

The Scottish Government has not been ignoring the issue, and I am sure that we will hear more on that from the minister. The Government has explicitly stated that it is reviewing the education of allied health professionals—a broader sweep of activity than the subject of tonight's debate—which is an important and necessary first step.

However, 2020 has added significantly to the need for progress on the issue. I agree that there is a need for adequate consideration of what is right for paramedics and auxiliary health professionals. I very much support the debate as a

useful opportunity to explore the issues, and I thank Liam McArthur once again.

19:30

**Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I welcome the opportunity to discuss this important subject. I have a family member who is a paramedic in my region. I congratulate Liam McArthur on bringing the debate to the chamber and associate myself with his comments.

More than ever, NHS and Scottish Ambulance Service employees are on the front line. Their duties require close interaction with the public and in any setting in which they are needed. We have heard in the chamber about many of the sacrifices that front-line healthcare workers have made and our gratitude to them cannot be overstated.

People who have entered the paramedic profession over the past year, on placement, will have found a service operating under very challenging circumstances. The expectations placed on them have been far from normal. The way in which they have adapted to the situation has been incredible and that must be recognised.

The Scottish Government has for some time recognised paramedics as a shortage occupation. There are simply not enough and paramedics have long reported being overstretched. At times, ambulance response levels have not been where I am sure any party in the chamber would want them to be. We hear of particularly poor examples of response times, which understandably cause concern to local residents.

We all hope that if we were faced with an accident or sudden illness an ambulance would not be far away. I recognise that those patients are triaged according to need, but, even in cases that may not be life-threatening, long ambulance waits can be problematic. It may be that an older person is left lying on the floor, unable to get up, or a vulnerable person is waiting in the cold. If there are not enough staff to get there quickly, every extra minute can mean additional suffering for a patient.

Both Liam McArthur and I are Orcadians and I am sure that each of us appreciates the distinct needs of communities such as the islands and the more rural parts of the Highlands that fall within my region. In smaller and more remote places, the challenges of understaffing become more acute. A staff absence or two can mean the difference between having two ambulances running or having a single service. In those situations, the prioritisation of services is sharpened; more difficult choices have to be made.

In some cases, those communities can be more resilient and will band together to get someone to hospital where it is safe to do so, but that is not always an option and it obviously presents additional risks. Therefore, it should be a point of consensus that we need to attract more people into the ambulance service. The differential support that is available when paramedics are compared with nurses and midwives begins to seem difficult to justify.

We have come a long way in terms of the expectations placed on paramedics. In 1964, the Millar report recommended that ambulances, rather than simply being for patient transport, should also be equipped to provide emergency services on board. That led to the introduction of an eight-week course covering first aid and patient care; after a year's reviewed work, a proficiency certificate was gained.

It was not long until additional duties were assigned, with ambulance staff becoming key first responders. That process has continued at pace and the change, even in relatively recent times, has been considerable. It should be obvious that paramedics are every bit as important to a functioning national health service as hospital-based medical staff.

The Scottish Government has said that that will be reviewed, alongside a wider review of the education and training of the allied health professions. That is a welcome commitment. However, as it does that review, it should keep in mind some of the concerns and individual stories that we have heard from the pay student paramedics campaign.

The campaign has opened up the experience of training, the realities of working shifts on an ambulance as a student, and the sacrifices that many have made to get into that position, and which they are making while they learn. As significantly, it has identified the problems that come with taking on additional work when they are working the same shifts as qualified paramedics and the effects that that has.

I welcome today's motion and believe that we should all be focusing on how we can better support the education of people in this vital part of our NHS.

19:34

**Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab):** I thank Liam McArthur for securing this important members' business debate.

Just weeks ago, the First Minister and others joined thousands of people across Scotland in stepping out on to their doorsteps and clapping for our carers and key front-line health workers.

Paramedics are, of course, a vital part of the health service in providing an immediate response to accidents and medical emergencies. They are often the first on the scene to assist people who may be badly hurt, severely traumatised or seriously ill. They have the skills and knowledge to assess and manage a whole range of illnesses and injuries, and they often provide care for people in their own homes to help to reduce avoidable hospital admissions. They are a critical and integral part of our health service, but they are chronically short staffed. Sixty-three per cent of ambulance workers believe that their team is understaffed; that figure rises to 67 per cent for paramedics.

If there is any good outcome at all of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is that it has made us value our key workers and NHS staff like never before and inspired a new generation of young people to seek out careers as medical professionals. However, Scotland's student paramedics are getting a raw deal.

The Scottish Government rightly introduced the nursing and midwifery student bursary, which now stands at £10,000 per year of financial support, none of which is repayable. As Mr McArthur outlined, that allows student nurses and midwives to enter their new career path debt free. However, the Scottish Government will not introduce the same level of support for student paramedics, and that makes no sense.

A quick comparison shows that student paramedics do the same placement hours as student nurses and midwives; that many are unable to take second jobs because of time pressures and, as a result, are forced into living below the poverty line; and that, unlike their nursing and midwifery counterparts, they are not offered a bursary for childcare costs while on placement. The current system is manifestly unfair and unjust, and it leaves student paramedics in Scotland undergoing intensive training with little or no support.

If the Scottish Government is serious about getting a new generation of paramedics into courses and eventually into jobs, which it needs to do to help to plug the gap of 43,000 shifts that the Scottish Ambulance Service says that it has been unable to cover in recent years—Mr McArthur referred to that—it must act now.

Last month, the First Minister told me that the Government was looking into student paramedic funding, but her health secretary could say only that it

"will be considered as part of the Scottish Government's planned review of the education provided to the Allied Health Professions."—[Written Answers, 2 October 2020; S5W-31895.]

In the answer to a further parliamentary question, she could give me no timetable for the review even to start. That is cold comfort for students and campaigners. A commitment to be considered in a future review with no timescale is not good enough.

The Scottish Government should match the bursary support that is already in place in England and Wales and pay student paramedics, lift those students out of poverty, make the system fairer and encourage more people into that vital profession.

19:38

**Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green):** I, too, thank Liam McArthur for bringing this important debate to the chamber, and I also thank the pay student paramedics campaign for its assiduous and very effective campaigning.

As in other highly valued roles in health and social care, Scotland has a shortage of paramedics. As we have heard, the Scottish Government's shortage occupation submission to the Migration Advisory Committee last year showed that paramedics have a high vacancy rate of 3 per cent and that around half of those unfilled posts went unfilled for three months or more.

Last year's Unison report, "An emergency but no accident: A UNISON survey of Scottish Ambulance Service staff" revealed some of the reasons why that might be the case. It showed that 98 per cent of paramedics reported that their workloads had increased and that 67 per cent said that their teams were understaffed.

That is why it is crucial to do all that we can to make this the attractive career choice that it should be. That means supporting students to study. As the pay student paramedics campaign group tells us, there is still much to do to make that a reality.

The central request is for a £10,000 bursary for student paramedics. The Greens fully support that. The many unpaid shifts that are required, which mean that students have only two weeks of summer leave, make it difficult—impossible, really—for them to work over the summer to support themselves as many other students do. The number of hours required by those shifts is similar to those required of nursing and midwifery students, as colleagues have said, yet there is a gulf between the bursary support that is available to both groups. That is a bizarre anomaly that must be addressed.

The inequality does not end there. Single parents studying paramedical science could get up to £1,000 less than their peers in nursing and midwifery degrees. Also, as others have

mentioned, they do not receive the up to £2,466 in childcare support that is on offer to those other students.

All told, £30,000 of funding is available to nursing and midwifery students. As should be the case, none of that is repayable. Meanwhile, paramedical science students get around £23,000, of which £17,000 must be repaid.

Scotland is falling behind. This year the UK Government announced £5,000 in non-repayable bursary funding for a range of healthcare occupations experiencing staffing shortages, including paramedics.

I want to reflect on how the situation has arisen. Paramedics are essential front-line staff: our NHS could not function without them. I have read the briefing for this debate, but it is still not clear why such a gap has opened up between the support available to student paramedics and that available to students training for other health professions. There is an important learning opportunity here, and I look forward to the minister's explanation of how we have reached this point.

The campaign's report "Student Paramedics on the Poverty Line" makes even more concerning reading. A survey revealed that 82 per cent of students surveyed struggled to make ends meet between pay periods and that 68 per cent struggled to feed themselves and their dependants. The report also says that some students have to rely on food banks to feed themselves.

In 2017, the Scottish Ambulance Service had to pay £6.3 million in overtime due to shortages of paramedics. Basic maths tells us that the same amount of money would pay for 630 bursaries for student paramedics at £10,000 each: that would be a better way to spend the money.

Coronavirus has shown, more than ever, how important it is that we value all our health and social care staff. We must ensure that our paramedics are fully supported to do a difficult, stressful, rewarding and vital job. A good start to that would be to ensure that student paramedics do not have to put themselves into financial difficulty to do that job.

19:43

**The Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing (Joe FitzPatrick):** I thank Liam McArthur for lodging the motion and commend him for his commitment to highlighting the issues. I am grateful for the opportunity to respond on behalf of the Scottish Government and for the contributions from all the speakers.

As Liam McArthur said, paramedics make a huge contribution to the health and social care of

the people of Scotland and I value the tremendous job that they do in a wide range of circumstances. As Stewart Stevenson said, although I do not necessarily agree with every word of Liam McArthur's speech, I agree with his sentiments.

Student paramedics have also made a valuable contribution to our response to Covid-19, as Iain Gray said, and I thank them for the support that they have provided and continue to provide. I whole-heartedly agree that financial support for students undertaking a degree in paramedic science is worth further consideration. That is why I have accepted an invitation from the student campaigners to engage with them directly on the issue.

A number of members talked about the bursaries and other support available elsewhere in the UK. It is important that we look at the whole package available in each part of the UK. I do not think that the majority of members of this Parliament would want students to have to pay the £9,250 per year that English students pay for tuition fees, in exchange for a £5,000 bursary. It is important to look at the issue in the round. As part of the package that we provide to students in the allied health professions, we meet additional costs specific to training, such as those for uniform, placement and travel expenses, and the cost of health checks, but I recognise that we need to look closely at the specific issues raised by the campaign, and that is why I have agreed to meet its representatives.

Paramedics are members of the allied health professions and, at present, those students do not receive a bursary. The Government believes that there is a need to consider the support that is available for all those students as part of a system that is fair and sustainably balanced in terms of overall availability. For that reason, and as Stewart Stevenson said, we have made a commitment to undertake an education review for all allied health professions. I guess that other allied health professionals will thank the paramedic students for the efforts that they have made to raise the issue on behalf of all of them.

I can confirm that financial support for students, including paramedic science students, will form part of the review. Liam McArthur suggested that that was perhaps just warm words, but I can absolutely confirm that we have recently appointed a professional adviser to lead on that work, alongside our chief allied health professions officer and her officials, and they will engage directly with stakeholders on the structure and priorities for the review as it moves forward.

That said, Mr McArthur will understand the challenges that the present pandemic presents to our economy and our health service. As a result, the Government must give serious consideration

to any further continuous commitment of financial support. We are seriously looking at that, and this is a serious process that we have started.

Jamie Halcro Johnston and Iain Gray talked about staffing numbers and increasing demand, and I reassure the Parliament that we are not standing still on increasing capacity and reducing individual workload across the Scottish Ambulance Service. We have invested almost £900 million over the past four years, and we have committed to training an additional 1,000 paramedics over the course of this parliamentary session. With that investment, the Ambulance Service has achieved more than 95 per cent shift coverage over the past three years, and the service has robust contingencies in place to deal with staff absences and ensure that patient care is not affected.

Additionally, the Ambulance Service is carrying out a review of demand and capacity at a national level. That will include a national shift review to amend rosters and to ensure that the service is working as efficiently as possible within existing resources. The review will also determine future resource requirements to ensure that the service can continue to meet the increasing demand. The Scottish Government is committed in its support of that work, which is being carried out in partnership with all three trade unions involved with the Scottish Ambulance Service.

**Liam McArthur:** Will the minister take an intervention on that point?

**Joe FitzPatrick:** A brief one.

**Liam McArthur:** I am grateful to the minister for taking the intervention, although I am slightly discombobulated by the fact that I find him sitting behind me.

My understanding is that the demand and capacity review is due to conclude in November, with the recommendations presented to the minister around February 2021. Can the minister advise when he expects to be able to take a decision in response to the recommendations?

**Joe FitzPatrick:** It will depend on the content of the report, but there is clearly an interest in that in the Parliament, and it is obviously a good thing if we are all on the same page on this matter, particularly as we are moving towards an election. It sounds like there is universal recognition of the work that paramedics do and the role that they play as part of our health service.

As Liam McArthur said, the paramedic science degree is a new course, and it is a popular one, with initial enquiries suggesting that there are more than five applicants for each place. I reiterate that, while the recruitment of newly qualified paramedics is important, it remains only one part of the planning response that is needed to meet

today's demand on the Scottish Ambulance Service.

Other actions include the recruitment of ambulance technicians and already-qualified paramedics, as well as the further development of the paramedic workforce. Advanced paramedics are being trained with additional clinical skills to support the ambition to ensure that more patients can be treated at home or in a community setting, and to prevent unnecessary accident and emergency admissions. As Mr Halcro Johnston alluded to, that role is particularly important in our island and rural communities.

Mr McArthur specifically mentioned ambulance provision on Orkney. I can advise that the service removed on-call working and moved to 24/7 cover at Kirkwall station in April 2020. I am pleased to be able to confirm that, to support that positive change, the service has recruited two additional A and E staff, who will begin training shortly, and it is in the process of recruiting an additional advanced paramedic to work on the islands. As a result of Covid-19, the service has enhanced its air-transfer capacity to ensure that it has the resources in place to safely transfer patients off the islands to mainland healthcare facilities, should that be required.

Once again, I thank Liam McArthur for bringing this important matter to our attention. I am fully assured that the Ambulance Service is doing all that it can to ensure that it has the appropriate resources in place to meet demand and continue to deliver a high level of emergency and urgent healthcare on Orkney and throughout Scotland.

The Scottish Government is as committed in its support of paramedic science students in Scotland as it is to the Ambulance Service itself, and I look forward to meeting the student campaigners to discuss their concerns in the very near future.

*Meeting closed at 19:51.*





This is the final edition of the *Official Report* for this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

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