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Scottish Parliament

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

Portfolio Question Time

Finance

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Good afternoon. Our first item of business is portfolio question time. The first portfolio is finance.

Treasury (Engagement)

1. Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what recent engagement it has had with the Treasury. (S5O-04729)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Kate Forbes): I am in regular communication with Treasury ministers, and my officials are in close contact with Treasury officials. As recently as 2 November, I wrote to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, seeking greater clarity on Covid-19 funding consequentials as well as flexibility regarding the job retention scheme.

Ruth Maguire: I know that the cabinet secretary has already welcomed the positive—although long overdue—announcement about the extension of the job retention scheme. However, there are still questions about the poor targeting of the self-employment income support scheme, which offers no relief for people who have become self-employed more recently. Will the cabinet secretary set out the impact of that approach on the self-employed in Scotland, and will she continue to push the chancellor to improve the scheme?

Kate Forbes: Ruth Maguire has raised an important point. Due to the continuing gap in eligibility for the United Kingdom-wide scheme, an increasing number of self-employed people have had no support since the beginning of the pandemic.

The Scottish Government has tried to step in where it can—for example, through grants made under the newly self-employed hardship fund. However, I will continue to ask the chancellor to review the eligibility requirements for the UK Government's scheme, so as to open up such support to self-employed people who, so far, have been unfairly excluded.

The Presiding Officer: I should have indicated that questions 1 and 3 have been grouped together. We will now take question 3 and then come back to question 2.

Chancellor of the Exchequer (Discussions)

3. Linda Fabiani (East Kilbride) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government when it last spoke with the office of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. (S5O-04731)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Kate Forbes): I am in regular contact with the office of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. As recently as 2 November, I wrote to the chancellor, asking for an urgent meeting to discuss consequentials as well as the furlough scheme. Unfortunately, that meeting did not take place.

Linda Fabiani: It is my view that our response to the pandemic needs to be long term and involve forward thinking. I know that councils across the country, which have Covid recovery plans, feel the same. I am therefore concerned that the United Kingdom Government has reduced its spending review limits to one year, which does not allow proper longer-term planning—financial or otherwise—to take place. Does the cabinet secretary intend to discuss that at her next meeting with the chancellor?

Kate Forbes: Linda Fabiani has raised an important point. Throughout the pandemic, our ability to respond quickly has been contingent on our having both flexibility and clarity on funding.

Looking ahead, under the current arrangements we are dependent on receiving a funding settlement from the UK Government for next year's Scottish Government budget, which we are already starting to plan. If the UK Government will indicate our funding for only a year at a time—and, at that, will not do so in a fulsome way, through a budget, rather than through a spending review—it is hard for us to plan beyond that point. The UK spending review that will take place later this month will give us only a provisional and partial picture ahead of the fuller information that will appear in the delayed UK Government budget, for which we still do not have a date.

I want to be clear that the UK Government's spending review is not the same as its budget, so we will have to set our budget in advance of knowing what the UK Government's tax and spending plans are for the coming year. It will be clear to everyone—including those in local government and members in the chamber—that that will make it difficult for us to plan financially for the longer term.

The Presiding Officer: At this point we will take supplementaries to questions 1 and 3.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Over the past few weeks, the UK Treasury has given the Scottish Government additional spending guarantees of £1.7 billion, which takes

the total of such guarantees made in the current financial year to £8.2 billion.

We all have constituents—both individuals and businesses—who are suffering from Covid-19 restrictions and are desperate for support. When will the Scottish Government set out to members in the chamber how these new funds will be allocated?

Kate Forbes: To be completely clear, every penny of that additional funding, as with all consequentials that we receive from the UK Government, will be spent on dealing with Covid, and a substantial amount is being spent on supporting businesses. Murdo Fraser will already be aware of the initial £2.3 billion. That was exceeded in the autumn budget revision and exceeded again with the October restrictions and it will continually be exceeded by the on-going financial support to businesses that are being impacted.

Murdo Fraser will also know that the next point at which we will clarify and formally detail how that money is spent is the spring budget revision, but I have indicated to the Finance and Constitution Committee that I am keen to be flexible and to provide as much transparent information as possible on how that money is being spent in advance of that budget revision.

Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP): What discussions have there been with the UK Government specifically about the differentiated economic impact of Covid both within and between the nations of the UK?

Kate Forbes: That issue regularly comes up at the quadrilateral meetings of the finance ministers and it came up again last month. I also detailed it in my letter to the chancellor last week because, given the different impacts, with different restrictions happening at different points according to the health advice, it is important to have maximum financial flexibility so that the Scottish Government and indeed the Welsh Government and the Northern Ireland Executive can tailor our Covid support to each nation's distinct needs.

To be fair to the Treasury, that is one of the reasons why it has put in place a guarantee that slightly deviates from the normal means of providing consequentials, which would be only as and when announcements are made. That has helped, but of course Tom Arthur will know that, from the beginning, I have asked for some temporary flexibilities around our financial settlement in order to tailor our response further.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Can I get an update on discussions with the UK Government over the future of BiFab, which is now at a critical stage? Commitments were given at last week's ministerial statement for a UK and

Scottish Government working group, but time is now running out and there appears to be a lack of urgency.

Kate Forbes: As Claire Baker will know, it is my colleague Fiona Hyslop who leads on the response to BiFab. Those conversations with the UK Government are on-going and there has been a willingness to work together when it comes to BiFab. I know that Fiona Hyslop outlined more information on that in her statement last week and has committed to keeping Parliament regularly updated in light of the importance of BiFab, not just to local members and to the workforce but to Scotland.

Green Recovery

2. Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it will finance the green recovery. (S5O-04730)

The Minister for Public Finance and Migration (Ben Macpherson): The Scottish Government is committed to a green recovery from Covid-19 that captures the potential opportunities of our transition to net zero and, crucially, creates good, green jobs in Scotland. We are already investing significant sums in that, not least an additional £2 billion of capital spending for transformative net zero projects over the next parliamentary session, a multi-annual commitment to peatland restoration worth £250 million, and a £62 million energy transition fund that was announced this summer.

Our continued commitment to a green recovery will be set out in the upcoming climate change plan update and 2021-22 budget.

Gillian Martin: Job losses in my area are a particular concern, with many of my constituents working in the oil and gas sector. This week, the Scottish Tory leader said that we should abandon climate change targets to protect oil and gas jobs. Does the minister agree that that ill-informed and simplistic view ignores the fact that oil and gas workers' expertise is key to a transition into a more sustainable economy and that, in order to build the sectors of the future, Scotland needs the borrowing powers to front load recovery and to create the right conditions for new jobs and a future for the workers of the north-east?

Ben Macpherson: I agree with Gillian Martin. As I said, the Scottish Government remains committed to achieving net zero by 2045 and to doing so in a just way. That is why we have committed to a just transition fund, as I mentioned in my previous answer, and why we are building from the principles that are already embedded in our climate change legislation and the advice from the independent just transition commission's interim report.

As the member would expect, planning will be crucial to ensuring that opportunities from the transition for the economy and society are not missed, and that risks associated with rapid structural change are mitigated. It is crucial that a sustainable and resilient future is developed for those in the oil and gas sector and its supply chain, whose skills and expertise will be vital for the transition. As always, as the cabinet secretary mentioned a few moments ago, we continue to press the United Kingdom Government for more financial flexibility, particularly around borrowing, to support our economy, especially in the context of the pandemic.

Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con): I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests.

Since 2016, the Scottish National Party has spent millions of pounds promoting recycling, but Scotland's recycling rate is actually worse than it was then. A further £2.8 million has been thrown at SNP-run Glasgow City Council, with no improvement seen in the latest figures. In fact, 11 local authorities have recycling rates that are either stagnating or declining. Can the minister explain why so little has been achieved, despite so much being spent?

Ben Macpherson: Our commitment on recycling is embedded in legislation and is in partnership with local government. Recycling is an important part of our collective commitment to and focus on reducing our waste in a way that is as carbon neutral as possible. We are focused on an approach that utilises innovation and involves consideration of how to reduce carbon in the chain of the recycling process, as well as a move towards greater upcycling in society as a whole.

The work is on-going. I will consider the aspect that Maurice Golden has raised, and I am happy to write to him with more detail about those points. However, it is unfounded to question the Government's commitment to recycling. It is important that we work together collectively to boost and encourage recycling in society and to support local government in that endeavour.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): Green energy will be central to the recovery, so why are huge profits from wind energy projects being exported to the boardrooms of multinational companies across Europe and venture capital firms, when those profits could be kept in the community and used for public services? What hard cash is available for community and publicly owned wind farms?

Ben Macpherson: That is an important question. Neil Findlay will be aware that the UK emissions trading scheme—the contracts for difference scheme—is reserved, so many of the

aspects with which he contextualises his question are matters for the UK Government.

It is important to reflect on the historical position of the UK as a whole. Several decades ago, we had a comparative advantage in the development of wind energy technology, but we lost that. That is why the construction takes place in other European countries, as the member mentioned. However, in other areas of innovation, such as the marine energy sector, and particularly in tidal energy development, Scotland has several innovative companies that are at the forefront in the world on developing technologies.

The UK Government is currently reviewing the contracts for difference scheme, which is welcome. However, we need the UK Government to support the development of tidal energy and other forms of marine energy so that we can maintain the unique selling point and the technologies on which we have a comparative advantage in order to ensure that some of the considerations that Mr Findlay has raised about wind are not replicated in relation to the technologies that are being developed for the future.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): The minister will know that reducing transport emissions will be key to Scotland meeting its climate change objectives. Does he therefore accept the need for the Government to help to fund the replacement for the existing ferry fleet, including those ferries serving the lifeline internal routes in Orkney, with low-emission vessels? Will he commit to ensuring that that happens in a way that is in keeping with the urgency of the climate emergency and the needs of the island communities that are served by those ferries?

Ben Macpherson: Excuse me, Presiding Officer, but I did not pick up all of that question, because of the poor quality of the line. However, some of the points that Liam McArthur raised would perhaps be better directed at Mr Wheelhouse. I give an undertaking that I or Mr Wheelhouse will write to Mr McArthur on the points that he raised.

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I do not question the Government's commitment when it comes to renewables. However, when it comes to the creation of jobs in renewables in Scotland, the Government's story is one of failure. That is just a fact. Where are the jobs going to come from? What is the plan for jobs to build back a greener economy?

Ben Macpherson: As I mentioned in my initial response to Gillian Martin, as part of the programme for government, we have invested £100 million in the green jobs fund, in addition to the extensive package of skills and employment

support that we had already announced. As I also mentioned, we are investing in significant other initiatives in the programme for government as part of our mission to create new, good green jobs.

As Mr Rowley would expect, we are aligning that with the provision of skills and employment to support green jobs, including the £60 million youth guarantee. We are providing increased opportunities for green apprenticeships across public sector bodies, which I am sure is welcome, and there is the £25 million national transition training fund, which is aimed at supporting up to 10,000 people who face redundancy and unemployment, and sectors with the greatest potential for future growth, as part of which there is a focus on the provision of green skills.

Lots of investment is being provided and lots of work is on-going. Of course there is more work to do, but significant potential exists for Scotland to lead in green energy, and there is an opportunity for a significant return on our investment in green jobs. We should all get behind the national efforts to realise that potential.

High Streets (Regeneration Funding)

4. David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what further funding it will allocate to support the regeneration of high streets and encourage footfall, in light of the rise in online shopping due to Covid-19. (S5O-04732)

The Minister for Public Finance and Migration (Ben Macpherson): That is an important question. We have established a collaborative town centre review to develop a new vision for our towns, taking Covid-19 into account, and to establish the means to achieve that. The review, which is due to report in December, will help us to decide what further support might be needed for town centres.

Since March, we have provided £22 million for towns. In addition, we have launched our Scotland Loves Local campaign to encourage people to safely support their local businesses by shopping locally and accessing local online offerings. I know that David Torrance and many other members across the country have been actively supporting that campaign in their constituencies.

David Torrance: Over recent years, a number of high streets across the country have undergone dramatic changes as a result of a shift in our buying habits. In my constituency, Kirkcaldy town centre has been greatly impacted by the increase in online and retail park shopping, and it currently faces many challenges, including a significant number of empty buildings.

How can we encourage owners of vacant properties to turn them into affordable social

housing and promote town centre living, which has been shown to be a key factor in helping to regenerate high streets by increasing footfall and creating a sense of community ownership?

Ben Macpherson: The town centre review will consider all issues for town centres, including the provision of affordable social housing, the ownership of vacant properties and considerations around that when it comes to planning law. Kevin Stewart is very interested in that, as members would expect.

Many local authorities are promoting town centre living, and it is a key theme of our town centre action plan. We are further supporting it through our town centre fund and the regeneration capital grant fund, through which local authorities are repurposing vacant and derelict properties for affordable housing. The potential exists for significant change in that regard.

David Torrance asks an important question. If he would like to follow it up in writing with me and Mr Stewart as the review is published, we would welcome such correspondence.

The Presiding Officer: Question 5 comes from Claudia Beamish, who joins us remotely.

Local Authorities (Budget Shortfalls)

5. Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what measures it plans to take to meet any budget shortfall that local authorities are facing going into winter. (S5O-04733)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Kate Forbes): I recognise the pressures on local government, which has in many ways been on the front line in our response to Covid, whether through providing business grants or welfare support.

We have committed £382.2 million in additional Covid-related funding to local authorities, and on 8 October I announced a package of financial flexibilities for Scotland's councils that was developed with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, and which could be worth up to £600 million over the next two years.

We are also currently working with COSLA to finalise a lost-income scheme that would be worth an estimated £90 million. Taken together, those measures bring the value of the overall support package for councils up to £1 billion.

The financial settlement for this year had already provided an increase in day-to-day spending. Clearly, while there are additional pressures, that additional funding will go some way, at least, towards supporting local authorities.

Claudia Beamish: I thank the cabinet secretary for that detailed answer.

However, local authorities have little resilience after 10 years of cuts, despite all the different funds that the cabinet secretary has highlighted. The Scottish Parliament information centre has estimated that funding to local authorities fell by 7 per cent in real terms between 2013 and 2020.

Additional support for local authorities, in the form of permission to delay payments on borrowing and short-term borrowing, gives immediate respite, but only pushes the problem down the line. Without more funding, how can councils prevent cuts to vital services? Will the Scottish Government respond to Unison's call for it to plug the gap and look at the matter again?

Kate Forbes: Rather than dispute whether local government funds have been cut—I put that in the context of the overall cuts to the Scottish Government's budget after a decade of Tory austerity—I make the point right now that, as we look ahead, we need to ensure that we work closely in partnership with local authorities to respond to Covid. I said at the outset that they have, in many ways, been on the front line of the response, and I think that their response has been exemplary.

We work very closely with COSLA to understand the financial impact on local government; we will continue to do that in advance of next year's budget. However, when it comes to next year's budget, it is worth bearing it in mind that we will be setting a Scottish budget with partial and provisional estimates from the UK Government in advance of its budget, so it will be an extremely difficult budget to set. I want to ensure that we support local authorities and protect their budgets, but to do that I need maximum clarity and support in our budget from the UK Government.

Additional United Kingdom Government Funding

6. Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how the additional £700 million of funding from the United Kingdom Government for the current financial year will be spent. (S5O-04734)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Kate Forbes): Every penny of the additional £700 million—and, indeed, every penny of any additional consequentials that we receive from the UK Government—will be, and has been, spent on dealing with Covid. A significant amount has been spent on directly supporting businesses in the light of the economic impact, as well as, of course, on ensuring that the health service can respond to Covid.

Thus far, more than £2.3 billion has been spent on supporting business. The most recent autumn budget revision provided a further £190 million in business support, including employment and training support. Since then, we have gone further in providing, initially, over £40 million for businesses that are directly affected by the second wave of the pandemic, although that number continues to rise weekly as business grants are paid out under the current strategic framework.

Edward Mountain: I thank the cabinet secretary for that answer.

Given the increased amount of unallocated money that the Scottish Government now holds, will the cabinet secretary consider increasing funding for care-at-home providers in order to allow carers to spend more time with those whom they care for in the home environment, as a result of Covid-19?

Kate Forbes: I thank Edward Mountain for that question. It is worth clarifying that there is a difference between the formal allocation process in the autumn budget revision, which he alluded to, and the fact that every penny that we receive is going towards budget pressures that we know of.

Edward Mountain rightly mentioned pressures on health and social care. It is important that that funding is available; of course, it is likely that the most recent guarantee will need to last for the next five months, until the end of the financial year.

We will ensure that funding that needs to be spent on health and social care is paid to health and social care. Edward Mountain will know that the most recent autumn budget revision included another £1.8 billion for the health and social care budget, bringing total health and social care Covid-19 spending to more than £2.4 billion.

Covid-19 is, first and foremost, a health crisis, so we will continue to prioritise health funding through the remainder of this financial year and beyond.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): The news of a guarantee of further consequential payments is generally welcome. However, we are all aware that although the Chancellor of the Exchequer has made it clear that support for businesses in England will be open ended, the same assurance has not been provided for businesses in Scotland. Will the cabinet secretary say whether the Scottish Government has received further clarification on how funding will be provided for demand-led business support in Scotland, where demand is greater than the Barnett share?

Kate Forbes: Stuart McMillan touches on a particular concern that we have with the way in which our budgets are set. I am, of course, obliged

by law to balance the budget, but when there is a requirement to fund demand-led schemes such as business support schemes that involve an unquantifiable number of businesses for an indefinite period of time, there are challenges.

The UK Government has made moves to provide the guarantee to which I alluded, but we need reassurance that businesses in Scotland will receive the support that they need, even if that support exceeds the guarantee that has been provided to date. If demand is greater than the funding that is provided, we need reassurance that it will be funded.

No such funding assurance has been provided yet, but I continue to press the case and to try to work constructively with the UK Government to ensure that we can proactively manage our response to the pandemic, whether we are talking about the economic challenges or the health issues.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): The finance secretary referred to the guarantee; it seems that she is mirroring what the UK Government is doing with grant support. I have come across lots of businesses that are missing out on financial support that they really need. What flexibility does the cabinet secretary think she can get through the system? Can she get that flexibility from the UK Government?

Kate Forbes: Willie Rennie's question touches on a challenge that we face right now, which is that we are, because of the need for me to balance my budget and ensure that we cannot overspend, required to use the funding that we have. We must make it go as far as possible, on the understanding that I need to be prudent and cannot overspend.

In the funding that we have provided to date, we have tried to push the spending envelope as far as possible. That is why, going back a few months, we provided the pivotal enterprise resilience fund, which was the only fund of its kind in the UK, and the hardship scheme, which was also the only one of its kind in the UK. Most recently we announced additional funding for nightclubs and the soft-play sector, for example. I am keen that where we can provide additional funding, over and above what the UK Government is providing, we do so.

Right now, with my hands being tied by the need to balance my budget, I will use the funding that has been provided and will make it go as far as possible, but the grants that we have provided on a recurring basis as part of the strategic framework are in line with the grants that are being provided by the UK Government in England.

Furlough Scheme (Discussions with United Kingdom Government)

7. Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the UK Government regarding the furlough scheme. (S5O-04735)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Kate Forbes): The Scottish ministers and officials have had numerous discussions—perhaps too many to count—with their UK counterparts about the furlough scheme. There have been eight different versions of the furlough scheme announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, three of which have not been implemented. All that has happened while employers have struggled to keep track and to make business decisions.

We welcomed the chancellor's long-overdue announcement, at the 11th hour, that the coronavirus job retention scheme would be extended until March 2021. We have repeatedly urged the UK Government to make that support available for as long as it is needed. Although the extension will help to prevent job losses, it has come too late for many businesses and workers, in all our constituencies.

Dr Allan: The chancellor's recent announcement that the furlough scheme will be extended was welcome. However, the months of unnecessary confusion that the UK Government has caused have meant that some employers took the difficult decision to make people redundant because they expected the scheme to be withdrawn. The UK Government had fair warning that that would happen—indeed, the Scottish National Party had been calling for months for an extension.

Does the cabinet secretary believe that Scotland's businesses deserve better than the UK Government's confused approach?

Kate Forbes: That "confused approach" has caused unnecessary confusion and hardship for employers and workers throughout Scotland at an extremely challenging and difficult time. As Alasdair Allan said, we called for months for an extension. It took England going into lockdown for the chancellor to change his tune and extend the scheme for a month, and it took a bizarre exchange within the Scottish Conservative Party in the past week to see him extend it to March.

Since the coronavirus job retention scheme was announced in March, we have repeatedly called on the UK Government to ensure that it continues for as long as businesses and workers need it. It is clear that the delay has cost many people their jobs. It is highly likely that some of those job losses would have been prevented if the chancellor had taken the decision to extend the furlough scheme earlier in the year.

There are pertinent questions to be asked about why the chancellor changed his mind, and why he did not value Scottish and, indeed, Welsh businesses as much as he valued English businesses.

The Presiding Officer: I apologise to Michelle Ballantyne. I am afraid that we will have to move on to environment, climate change and land reform portfolio questions.

Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform

Marine (Scotland) Act 2010

1. Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government how it is meeting its duty under the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 to ensure the protection and enhancement of the health of the Scottish marine area. (S5O-04737)

The Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment (Mairi Gougeon): Scotland's national marine plan, which was adopted in 2015, sets out the framework for the sustainable development and use of our marine area in order to protect and enhance the marine environment while promoting both existing and emerging industries. The marine protected area network covers 34 per cent of our seas, and work continues to complete further site designations, to implement the required management measures and to deliver a monitoring programme. We have a robust process in place for licensable marine activities, to ensure that their environmental impacts are managed and minimised.

Claire Baker: A leaked unpublished Government report titled "Scottish Overall Assessment 2020" provides a bleak scientific assessment and concludes that marine habitats in five regions have shrunk in the past nine years. Why is the Government yet to announce the classification of marine special protection areas to protect our sea birds, as is required under European Union law, despite the first draft publication being produced in 2014 and the final advice being received to classify the sites in 2018? Classifying those important sites would be a clear opportunity for the Government to demonstrate its commitment to reversing biodiversity loss, maintaining EU standards and ultimately giving sea birds and their habitats a brighter future.

Mairi Gougeon: I assure Claire Baker that work on designating the MPA and SPA sites is on-going. We completed the consultation, and I hope that Claire Baker and other members across the chamber understand that that work was delayed because of Covid-19 and the way in which all areas of Government have had to respond to it. However, I assure Claire Baker that we are

continuing that work as well as continuing with a whole host of other measures that are under way.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Does the minister agree that there is a need for greater protection of our coastal waters, as is advocated by the #OurSeas campaign group and the Community of Arran Seabed Trust? What steps will be taken over the next 18 months to enhance that protection?

Mairi Gougeon: I agree with Kenny Gibson, and I absolutely recognise the need to protect our coastal waters. That has been set out in the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 and Scotland's national marine plan.

As I said in my response to Claire Baker's question, Scotland's MPA network exceeds the anticipated targets, which require 30 per cent sea coverage under the Convention on Biological Diversity. Over the next 18 months, we will take forward fisheries management measures for a number of inshore MPAs and for 11 priority marine features outside MPAs. As I said in my response to Claire Baker's supplementary question, there is on-going work to complete the network of Scottish MPAs.

I hope the member understands that that work could not have been progressed as we would have liked because of all we have had to deal with due to the Covid-19 crisis. We want to continue that work as soon as possible, but the timeline will depend on how soon we can resume stakeholder consultations in the light of Covid-19.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Given the aforesaid unacceptable leak of unpublished confidential reports from NatureScot relating to the health of the Scottish marine environment and the consequential loss of the confidence of our fishing communities, how does the minister plan to rebuild trust and confidence in Marine Scotland and NatureScot, particularly as we welcome back and look forward to the roll-out of vessel monitoring systems and in relation to the need for collaboration in data collection?

Mairi Gougeon: We work closely with all our stakeholders, and we will publish the marine assessment over the coming months. Those relationships are important to us, especially in relation to all the work that I have outlined today that we are currently undertaking on the designations of MPAs and SPAs. There are many interests involved in each of those designations and in all the work that we do, so, of course, the relationship that we have with each of those stakeholders is vital to enabling us to continue that work.

Scottish Environmental Protection Agency Powers (Sewerage System)

2. Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what powers SEPA has with regard to Scotland's sewerage system. (S5O-04738)

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Roseanna Cunningham): The Scottish Environment Protection Agency has the powers to set conditions on the licences that it issues to Scottish Water in order to protect the water environment from sewage discharges. SEPA can also take enforcement action for breaches of licence conditions.

Richard Lyle: Over the past few months, a constituent has had human effluent waste running down his driveway from houses next door that, surprisingly, do not seem to be connected to the sewerage system. Scottish Water and the local council have failed to resolve the problem, and they say that it is a private matter. Scottish Water suggests that SEPA does not have the power to regulate in the matter. If it does not, why not? Is it not an environmental situation?

Roseanna Cunningham: Obviously, there is some history to that situation that I am not aware of. I am happy for Richard Lyle to bring that detail to me, if he wants to. SEPA's powers for dealing with discharges of sewage are triggered only if there is an associated impact on the water environment, which means that SEPA does not have powers to address nuisance issues arising from sewage discharges to land unless they reach a watercourse. The local authority is responsible for dealing with sewage pollution to land. I am aware of a recent issue at Bothwell Road, where a private pipe was damaged; I understand that it has now been repaired. As I previously indicated, there are obviously some historical issues there, and I would be happy to engage further with Richard Lyle on the matter.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Heavy rainfall in August led to beaches up and down the Forth coast breaching safe water quality levels as sewerage systems overflowed, including in Kinghorn and Aberdour. Given that climate change will lead to more frequent occurrences of heavy rainfall events, what plans does the Scottish Government have to prioritise Scottish Water's investment in sewerage systems in coastal towns to increase capacity and stop those routine overflows of sewage on to our beaches?

Roseanna Cunningham: We have had to deal with sewage overflows on to beaches over a long period of time—that is the reality of dealing with a particular level of rainfall. The member is right to

flag up the increasing incidence of such events and the potential for this to become even more of an issue in the future. We look at such issues very carefully in relation to the investment in adaptations that will be required because of climate change—the member may be aware that there is now extra money for coastal defences and the flooding work that SEPA does—as well as looking to the infrastructure that Scottish Water may be involved in.

That work can be complex, and I know that a number of members have specific issues in their areas, particularly in relation to bathing waters. The way in which bathing waters are assessed involves consideration of a five-year period, so it can sometimes look a bit out of sync with what the reality is, but I would be happy to engage further with Mark Ruskell on the specific issue that he raises about his area of interest.

Green Recovery (Support for Communities)

3. James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what support is available to communities to support a green recovery from Covid-19. (S5O-04739)

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Roseanna Cunningham): We are committed to delivering a green recovery from Covid-19 that captures the possibilities of a just transition to net zero, including by creating good, green jobs. Action in this regard is at the heart of our recent programme for government, and communities will have a prominent role to play in its delivery.

We recently launched the £3.5 million community climate asset fund and the £2 million islands green recovery programme, which are both aimed specifically at supporting communities to play their part. Our town centre funds, including our £18 million town centre capital fund and our £1 million Scotland loves local fund, aim to promote, improve and green local places while supporting local economies and our 20-minute neighbourhood ambition.

James Dornan: It is clear that communities across Scotland have risen to the challenge of Covid by looking after one another while having to stay apart. The cabinet secretary says that they will be central to a green recovery. Can she outline what lessons can be learned from her experiences during Covid restrictions and how they can contribute to a greener, fairer future for Scotland's communities?

Roseanna Cunningham: Covid-19 has affected us all. My thoughts are especially with those who have lost loved ones to the virus. We can perceive that there are likely to be serious longer-term lessons to be learned from what has

happened. The way that we live, work and travel necessarily changed as we stayed at home to protect ourselves and each other. It is important that, as we recover from this experience, we learn lessons from that. Our social renewal advisory board is looking closely at just that—how we support communities through the pandemic; how, when it is possible, we return to a more normal way of life; and what needs to change to help us to build a fairer, more equal Scotland.

Climate Change (United Kingdom Government Investment)

4. Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife)

(Con): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the impact on Scotland of the UK Government's investment in measures to tackle climate change. (S5O-04740)

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Roseanna Cunningham): The upcoming net zero review and net zero strategy will be crucial in clarifying the level of ambition from the UK Government.

We continue to press the UK Government to take urgent action in a number of reserved areas, including by decarbonising the gas grid, particularly as Scotland's target of net zero by 2045 is five years ahead of the UK's target. The success of both Governments in reaching their respective targets is intrinsically linked. We also urge the UK Government to work with us on the joint UK emissions trading scheme, to maintain carbon pricing after we exit the European Union, instead of implementing a reserved carbon tax that will remove the Scottish ministers' accountability for a key mechanism to decarbonise 28 per cent of Scotland's emissions.

Alexander Stewart: Within the past fortnight, the UK Government has allocated £500,000 to develop electric vehicle batteries in Thurso and an extra £9 million to support dozens of green initiatives across Scotland. The investment in cutting-edge Scottish projects will help us to reach net zero by 2045. Will the cabinet secretary join me in welcoming that investment? Does she agree that climate change will be best tackled by Governments working together across the UK and the rest of the world for a better future?

Roseanna Cunningham: As I indicated in my earlier answer, a great deal of work is being done, including on the joint UK emissions trading scheme. Working together can be stymied by indecision on the part of the UK Government, which has, over this entire period, reserved the fallback option of a carbon tax, which it refuses to rule out. That is now jeopardising our ability to introduce that scheme on 1 January, when it is actually needed.

Money from anywhere is going to be useful in fighting climate change, but I need to advise the member that we need UK Government action in a number of different sectors. I have already raised the UK ETS. The net zero review, which is a completely separate thing, is Treasury led. Carbon capture and storage, low-carbon hydrogen, green hydrogen, contracts for difference, Ofgem, decarbonisation of energy networks, biomass, heat in buildings and hydrogen transport are all areas in which we need the UK Government to be moving faster than it already is. I hope that the member will join me in encouraging his counterparts south of the border to deal with us as equals, instead of what is happening at the moment.

Emissions Reduction (Urban Areas)

5. Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to reduce harmful emissions in densely populated urban areas. (S5O-04741)

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Roseanna Cunningham): Following an independent review, a consultation on a draft new air quality strategy for Scotland was published on 30 October. The new strategy sets out a series of actions for Government, Transport Scotland, local authorities and others to further reduce air pollution across Scotland. A number of the proposed actions relating to transport and domestic burning have particular relevance for densely populated areas. Our commitment to introduce low emission zones in Scotland's four biggest cities remains a key initiative for further improving urban air quality and protecting public health.

Fulton MacGregor: Can the cabinet secretary outline some details of the cleaner air for Scotland strategy that will contribute to reductions in emissions in urban areas, and say how the Scottish Government intends to engage with the public on the plans and encourage as many people as possible to respond to the consultation?

Roseanna Cunningham: As I have just highlighted, there are a number of specific actions that are of particular relevance for urban areas, including proposals to control the supply of the most polluting domestic fuels, which will help to improve air quality in our cities and towns. In addition, many of the transport actions will also deliver important benefits in urban areas. For example, we will work to deliver our active travel vision of enabling walking, cycling and wheeling to be the most popular modes of travel for short, everyday journeys by 2030.

We have been raising awareness of the consultation via stakeholder engagement and

through an on-going social media campaign, but I encourage everyone and anyone with an interest—that includes colleagues right across the chamber—to provide their views as part of this consultation, particularly those who will be impacted by the proposals. I gently suggest that this issue is a good thing for people to take back to their constituencies and that it could be used as a potential hook for various newspaper columns that need to be written. I know that thinking about what to write next can be a strain, so here is an ideal opportunity for everybody.

Waste (Illegal Dumping in Lay-bys)

6. Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what action it has taken in partnership with local authorities, landowners and tourism operators to prevent illegal dumping of waste in lay-bys. (S5O-04742)

The Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment (Mairi Gougeon): Fly-tipping is illegal, dangerous and completely unnecessary. Although this is primarily an issue for local authorities, we have supported the establishment of waste facilities in rural areas through our £9 million rural tourism infrastructure fund, and we are committed to working with partners at a national level to examine how we might make the best collective use of public resource to tackle waste management issues.

Stuart McMillan: The minister will be aware that tourism is everyone's business. Will she consider introducing a multi-agency public awareness campaign to make people aware of the dangers of dumping their chemical waste in lay-bys and to discourage wild campers from dumping their waste wherever they are? Does she agree that any public awareness campaign must have landowner representation in order to give it the best chance of success?

Mairi Gougeon: I am sure that Stuart McMillan will be aware that, in September, the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Tourism held a national summit on the issue, and that a multi-agency group was tasked to look at the difficulties that have been caused by irresponsible visitors. That group, which includes national park authorities, Scottish Natural Heritage, NatureScot, Forestry and Land Scotland and others, is due to report to ministers this month, hopefully with a series of recommendations on how the public sector might collectively manage visitors to the countryside. As all colleagues know, this is an issue that we need all these bodies to buy into, and we need them all to collaborate and work with us if we hope to tackle the issue effectively. Part of the focus of the national summit and the multi-agency group is on how those bodies can educate

and inform visitors and businesses and involve all the necessary stakeholders, including private landholders.

To go back to the member's first point about public awareness campaigns, along with Zero Waste Scotland, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and local authorities, we have developed waste marketing campaigns that address how to manage waste responsibly and which include messages on littering and fly tipping, and we have also conducted a campaign with Zero Waste Scotland and Keep Scotland Beautiful regarding littering, which was launched in the summer.

We want and need to get the message across that the behaviours that the member raises are unacceptable. We live in a beautiful country and people should, quite simply, dispose of their waste responsibly by putting their litter in a bin or taking it home.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): On that point, I ask the minister whether, in the discussions that she is having with local authorities, any thought has been given to legislative changes that would allow the local authorities to have powers to pursue the prosecution of fly tippers by means other than a report to the procurator fiscal.

Mairi Gougeon: I believe that that work may be part of the review of the litter strategy, which was looking at enforcement and penalties. I am happy to get back to the member with more information on that.

Flapper Skate (Egg Protection)

7. Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what urgent action it is taking to protect the eggs of the critically endangered flapper skate, which have recently been found off the north-west coast of Scotland. (S5O-04743)

The Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment (Mairi Gougeon): We welcome the discovery of flapper skate eggs in the inner sound, which provides further evidence of our rich and outstanding biodiversity. Marine Scotland has received initial advice from NatureScot regarding that particular location and they are now working together to consider the available evidence, including looking at the potential threats from all human activities, in order to determine the most appropriate action that we can take. I expect to receive advice on the matter imminently, which takes account of the urgency associated with it, in order to determine our next steps.

Pauline McNeill: The minister will be aware that flapper skate is an ultra-rare endangered species. I found out today that it is more endangered than

the giant panda, so I learned something today. NatureScot and the Scottish Association for Marine Science nurtured a flapper skate egg for the first time, from laying to hatching, which allowed scientists to confirm the gestation period accurately. Given that the marine protected area network currently fails to achieve ecological coherence and that there is only one designated area for the critically endangered flapper skate, is the minister really saying that it is a matter of time before there will be a second site to protect that endangered species? Is that where the Government is heading?

Mairi Gougeon: Pauline McNeill is absolutely right about how important the discovery of that species is and how important the species is. It is on the OSPAR convention's list of threatened and/or declining species and is listed as critically endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature red list. The discovery is vitally important and I reassure the member that we are treating it as a matter of urgency. However, there are a number of things that we have to take into consideration including, as I said in my first response, taking into account all human activities and looking at the best way to protect the site that has been found. I will, of course, continue to keep the Parliament updated as that work progresses.

The Presiding Officer: Apologies to Richard Lyle and Clare Adamson. I am afraid that we have run out of time.

University and College Students (Support)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Lewis Macdonald): The next item of business is a statement by Richard Lochhead, on universities and colleges: supporting students to return home safely at the end of term. The minister will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:54

The Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science (Richard Lochhead): I last stood in front of Parliament at the end of September to make a statement about supporting students through the global pandemic. Today, I want to provide a further update, specifically about supporting students to return home safely at the end of term for the festive holidays.

It is important to set out why education in our colleges and universities is so important at this time as we live with Covid until a vaccine arrives. This is probably obvious to many, but it is worth reiterating in the context of balancing all the harms that are caused by the virus: learning at college or university has a positive effect on students' personal development and on their wellbeing and life chances. In addition, it is crucial to our ability to develop the trained professionals that we need to support key services such as health and social care. It is also important for our economic growth, in particular as we recover from the negative impacts of both Covid and Brexit, as it provides a pipeline of the talent that we need to continue to grow our country.

I appreciate how difficult it might be at times to keep sight of that in the midst of the global pandemic. I also appreciate how difficult it has been for our students throughout the pandemic, and for staff in their efforts to ensure that learning can continue this year. The population as a whole has had to adapt continuously as Scotland has responded to the crisis, and students have been no exception.

For some students, the experience has been particularly tough, given that it may be their first time away from home or they may have come from other countries or had personal circumstances that have exacerbated any challenges with which they have been presented. I remain grateful to those students who have adjusted and continued to strive to achieve the education that they rightly deserve against the backdrop of the global pandemic. Again, I also thank the staff who have helped them to get through it and to achieve what they have achieved.

After a tough start to the academic year, many—but by no means all—students wish to go home at the end of term to see their family and friends. Of the 240,000 students who are usually at Scottish universities at this time of year, we expect between 60,000 and 80,000 to travel home at the end of term. Some college students will also travel, but in many cases the numbers will be smaller.

That means that around 160,000 to 180,000 students will not change their term-time address or household. That will include international and United Kingdom students who elect to stay in Scotland over the holiday period, students who commute from home and care-experienced students for whom university is home. The broad range of estimates that I have quoted reflects how challenging it is to predict student movements.

That said, we expect that a substantial number of people will wish to travel. As with travel involving large numbers of the population as a whole, that poses a potential risk of virus transmission. Our challenge is to look after the wellbeing of our students by enabling them to return home while keeping them, and the rest of society, safe, and helping them to keep their loved ones and communities safe. That is no easy task, but we have considered it in detail. Today, I am announcing the measures that will support students who choose to return home to do so safely.

First, student welfare is of paramount importance. College and university students will receive early and clear advice on how to stay safe, and those who choose to stay in university accommodation over the holiday period will be well supported.

Secondly, there will be staggered and early departure, irrespective of the level of the strategic framework in which an institution currently finds itself. Universities will be asked to make any necessary adjustments to scheduling to ensure that in-person teaching and assessment ends early enough to allow students time to get home at the end of term. I see that Universities Scotland has highlighted today the staggered dates for the end of in-person teaching at Scottish universities. Those dates run from late November to mid-December, so Universities Scotland is not expecting a great surge of movement.

A third measure will involve taking extra care. We will advise any student who wants to return home for the end of term to voluntarily reduce their social mixing for two weeks before going home. That means going out only for essential reasons and exercise. That is the advice for all, but it is most vital for those students who will be leaving from areas that are designated as being at a higher level in the strategic framework, and those

who are returning to households where there are vulnerable family members. I am sure that students will want to do all that they can to ensure that they do not take the virus back home with them.

The fourth measure is testing, which has been raised numerous times in the chamber. Enabling easy access to testing for students with symptoms has already proven to be effective in controlling outbreaks, and we will now be including Scottish students in a UK-wide initiative to test some asymptomatic students prior to the end of term.

The final measure in our plan is safe travel. All college and university students who are planning to travel home will be given guidance on how to do so safely. That includes following public health advice on the use of public transport. Where there might be issues with local public transport capacity, we will work with institutions and with Transport Scotland to enable safe travel.

We have also been working closely with the other Administrations across the UK to enable students to return home safely wherever they live and study. As members will all be aware, the UK Government and Welsh Government have also issued their plans, which are largely similar, today.

We will continue to work across the UK in supporting students, but we will do so with an emphasis on what is set out in our strategic framework. We will shortly publish a question-and-answer guide and more detailed guidance on the Scottish Government website, which will set out more information on the steps that we are announcing today. I have no doubt that the majority of students will want to act responsibly and will follow the measures that are being set out.

I turn now to testing. We recognise the particular concerns associated with students moving from one household to another for the winter break. As an additional layer in our work to support a safer return home, we will therefore be offering testing to students who are returning home. To do that, we will make use of a new Covid testing technology, lateral flow devices, which can provide a result in half an hour. The tests work by detecting antigens from the virus that causes Covid-19. Although those tests are not as sensitive as the gold-standard polymerase chain reaction—PCR—tests that we use for our main testing programme, they are able to identify a substantial proportion of cases, and they appear to be more sensitive when detecting people with the highest viral load: potentially, those who could be most infectious. In agreeing to set these measures in motion, we have quickly taken advantage of the latest advances in technology and capacity.

We intend to offer testing on a voluntary basis to all students who are returning home, based on

local and logistical circumstances. As previously indicated, that will involve between 60,000 and 80,000 students but, to be clear, precise numbers will obviously depend on how many choose to go home and whether they choose to take up the offer of a test.

We are currently planning on the basis that two tests will be necessary, five days apart, with PCR confirmation for positives where appropriate, but that position may change as public health professionals and clinicians take account of the new evidence that is coming forward from England, where a number of pilot studies have been undertaken.

What does that mean for our students? It is important to be clear about what the tests can and cannot do. We will be using them to test students to try and find Covid cases. The students concerned will be asked to isolate so that they do not transmit the disease further, and their close contacts will be asked to isolate so that they, too, do not transmit the disease if they have become infected. The tests provide a point-in-time assessment of whether a person has Covid, so they are useful for finding cases, but they cannot tell us with certainty that someone is Covid-free, and they cannot tell us whether a person is incubating the disease. We are asking students in Scotland to get tested and to isolate if they are positive or if they are a close contact, so as to help us reduce transmission. That means that it will be vital for students to continue to follow all the other measures in place to reduce transmission risks, even if they test negative.

Guidance for students on what test results mean and on the support that is available to them will be provided. The testing will be delivered through partnership with Scottish universities and collaborating with the wider UK Government testing programme. We are all aware of the challenges surrounding establishing the system in such a short timescale, but we are absolutely committed to working in partnership to deliver it for our students.

Supporting students to return home is only part of the equation. What happens in semester 2 is the other key part. While colleges and universities have supported students in their learning to date, it has been far from a normal experience. That was not helped by the outbreaks of Covid-19 within student accommodation at the start of term. During that period, through extensive work with universities, the National Union of Students and other partners, processes were put in place to support student wellbeing. Work was also undertaken to communicate key messages, including explanations of how the current restrictions on social gatherings apply to students living away from home.

Infection rates in student accommodation have now substantially reduced, with all known positive cases among university students since the start of term estimated to be around 1.5 per cent. Data from 5 November shows that new cases among students identified each day by universities, based on an average from the previous seven days, accounted for approximately 2 per cent of the national total over the same period.

While we no longer have the same level of infections among students as we did at the start of term, we must of course learn from that experience. There are many challenges in determining the approach to balancing the four harms so as to support students' education in semester 2. That is set within the context of considerable uncertainty around virus levels at that point and consideration of the strategic framework that will be in place nationally. We are reflecting on that as well as on the lessons from semester 1 as we further consider our next steps with the universities, the unions, the NUS and public health experts.

It is clear that the return after the new year will not be normal, and we will work with the sector to offer as much clarity for students and staff as we can in the coming weeks.

Covid-19 is a challenge for all of us—students included. We have all worked hard to support students in gaining an education this term and we have learned and adapted as we have progressed, as everyone else has.

I thank students for all their efforts and ask them to please keep doing all that they can to keep themselves and others safe, especially if they are making plans to go home.

Finally, I reiterate my thanks to all the staff and students the length and breadth of Scotland. I know that it has been tough, but together we will get through this.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister will now take questions on the issues that were raised in his statement.

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): I thank the minister for advance sight of his statement and add my thanks to our further and higher education staff, who are trying to deliver as near to normal an experience as they can in this difficult year.

I welcome the positive intention to get students back home for Christmas. The Conservatives have been calling for mass asymptomatic testing of students for many months now, so I am pleased that such testing forms an intrinsic part of the plans that were announced today. In reality, however, to administer 160,000 tests in a few short weeks is ambitious and that ambition must

translate into reality, so let me ask specific questions.

Can the minister guarantee that every student who wants a test will be able to access one, irrespective of their circumstance? Who will provide the tests and physically administer them, and who will provide the results? Can the minister guarantee that every student who gets the two tests will have them early enough so that they still have time to complete 14 days of isolation before Christmas—thus allowing them to get home if necessary—should they test positive?

As things stand, we are offering students a chance to go home with no idea if, or when, they will crucially be able to return to college and university—a goal towards which we must all strive. To avoid a repeat of what happened this summer, when will clear plans and guidance for semester 2 be announced?

Richard Lochhead: I thank Jamie Greene for his questions and the constructive way in which he asked them. Clearly, our absolute objective is to ensure that students can return home for Christmas, so the timetable will have to reflect that. We ask of universities that the tests will clearly have to be carried out in time to allow that to happen, should any student need to self-isolate for 14 days.

I can only assure Jamie Greene that, just as the UK Government south of the border, the Welsh Assembly Government and others will do, we will bust a gut to make that happen. We do not know the exact scale of the challenge because we do not know how many students want to go home and how many will voluntarily seek a test. The universities have assured us that they are up for delivering the tests, and we will work as closely as we can with them.

The universities will have the prime responsibility, which they have taken on, for delivering the tests. The UK Government contractors and the Scottish Government public health teams will work closely with them. A programme board is being set up at the moment, which will take forward those plans. We are working closely with the other home nations, because we all face similar situations, and I am confident that we will do all that we possibly can to get through this challenge and allow our students to return home safely.

As for semester 2, I said in my opening remarks that, as we stand here in early November, we cannot quite predict what the situation will be in January. However, we are determined to give students as much clarity as we can, and to ensure that our universities do the same, so that students know what to expect when they come back in the new year.

Again, I say that the situation will not be normal. We will do what is right for public health reasons, which will be first and foremost in our minds and, although we will also take into account other harms, we will have to consider where the virus is at that time.

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): I thank the minister for early sight of his statement. We have been asking for some time for a plan for students to be able to return safely home at Christmas, so the statement is welcome. Indeed, the return of students to universities in September was one of the worst-handled episodes in this pandemic, with soaring infection rates and hundreds of students who faced self-isolation in difficult circumstances.

It is good that we have a plan and good that it is a four-nation plan, given the movement across the United Kingdom. The lack of detail in the statement that the minister provided today is rather worrying. When will testing actually begin? Who will carry the cost of the tests? Does the minister recommend that all students should be tested before they return home? In England, the staggered period of home returns is identified as a fixed window from 3 to 9 December—what is it here?

Finally, what additional support will be provided through universities, and directly, to individual students who cannot return home over Christmas because they have been asked to self-isolate, having tested positive?

Richard Lochhead: Iain Gray asked a number of questions, and I will do my best to answer them.

On cost, we are part of a UK programme, and the UK Treasury will hopefully be covering the cost. We are in discussions about that, and hope to have clarity in due course.

I strongly recommend that all students who are considering going home for Christmas come forward voluntarily and take advantage of the asymptomatic testing that will be made available to them. That is the best way to minimise the risk of transmission of the virus in Scotland and elsewhere, which is the responsible thing to do. On the radio today I heard some students who had a very responsible attitude to the testing, could see the clear benefits of it and welcomed that step forward.

Across the whole of the UK, we are all in the same boat. We are talking about new technology that is being piloted, and the validation processes are being taken forward. We are at the stage at which we can use asymptomatic testing in our universities as part of a UK-wide pilot. That is why we face the challenge—it is a challenge that we are up for—of getting the programme in place to allow our students to go home safely.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I would like succinct questions and answers, please, as we are running a little behind time.

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): The minister rightly recognised that, for some care-experienced students, student accommodation is their home. In addition, many international and other students may decide not to travel home over Christmas for a variety of reasons. How will the Scottish Government ensure that further and higher education institutions take steps to protect those students' welfare and wellbeing over the winter break?

Richard Lochhead: Clare Adamson is absolutely correct. This year, universities are expecting more students to stay on campus and not go home for Christmas than in previous years, largely for the reasons that Clare Adamson referred to in relation to international students, such as the challenges with travelling overseas.

As I said, for care-experienced students, university is home. That is why one of the five measures to which I referred earlier is specifically about ensuring that universities work with us to deliver welfare support and care, and an enjoyable Christmas and festive season, on our university campuses. We are speaking to the universities about that, and they say that they are putting extra measures in place. It has been a tough year for everyone, and hopefully those extra measures will make a difference for students who find themselves unable, or who choose not, to go home.

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): As my colleague Jamie Greene said, we are pleased that the minister now recognises the potential value of testing asymptomatic students, which is something that we called for, and which the minister rejected, ahead of the return of students to universities and the subsequent outbreaks.

Does the minister now accept that he was wrong to ignore the call for asymptomatic testing to be introduced at an earlier stage? How will the new testing regime work with NHS Scotland's test and protect app, and what is the estimated number of Scottish students who have the app operating on their phones?

Richard Lochhead: The clinical governance will be worked up in the coming days in conjunction with colleagues across the home nations. We are learning from the pilots that took place down south.

I will make two points. First, testing is just one part of the toolbox. We cannot just rely on testing, and that is an important message to send out. It is not a panacea, and it is not a cure that will make it possible for everyone to stay safe and not get

infected with coronavirus. It is an important part of a package of measures, and the national advice that applies to everyone in Scotland, including students, is absolutely fundamental in keeping us safe. That is a strong message that we will convey to the student population in Scotland. Testing has a role to play, but the other measures that we need to adopt are crucial to keeping us safe.

With regard to test and protect, the clinical governance that is being worked up this week will look at the relationship between test and protect and the new asymptomatic testing. The new test—it is relatively new—is advanced and gives a result within half an hour, so we are now in a position to pilot asymptomatic testing. We were not in that position before.

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I am pleased that we have clarity with regard to students going home at Christmas, but I want to look a wee bit further ahead. What safeguards will be in place to ensure that we do not have a repeat of the rise in numbers of Covid-19 cases in the student population when students return to their campuses?

Richard Lochhead: We have to learn lessons from the start of the new term in September and October, when freshers arrived at university and there were outbreaks of Covid in university halls of residence. For the students who were affected, that caused a lot of distress and soured their experience of their first few weeks at university.

As members heard in the statistics that I provided earlier, the situation has dramatically improved. For students, going back to university or college after new year is quite different from attending freshers week during their first experience of university in September, so there will be a different set of circumstances.

However, we will not be complacent, and the rise in the number of cases nationally since September has to be taken into account in how we approach the new year. We will continue to discuss that with student representatives and the institutions, in order that we can provide as much clarity as possible in good time for students to know what to expect after the new year.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): The availability of testing of students this side of Christmas is welcome. Will the minister take the opportunity to commit to its on-going availability after Christmas and into the second term?

Richard Lochhead: I am sure that we will learn a lot from asymptomatic testing in our universities and colleges at the end of this term. We will continue to discuss the possibility of on-going asymptomatic testing, and to take advice from our clinical advisers and the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport, who has just arrived in the

chamber. Testing is advancing all the time, so we will continue to keep Parliament abreast of any future use of asymptomatic testing.

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): The Green Party's support for asymptomatic testing is well known. I welcome today's announcement, but I am concerned about the lack of any plan for testing students before and as they return to university in January. After two weeks of being scattered around the country, their return to halls could result in exactly the same kind of outbreaks as there were two months ago. When will the minister advise Parliament about the testing arrangements that will be applied at the end of the Christmas break—similar to those that he outlined for the start of the break—and when will he explain how testing will continue?

Richard Lochhead: I repeat the point that asymptomatic testing—indeed, any testing—is not a panacea. It plays an important role, but it is important that students and the rest of us recognise that it is one of a series of measures that must be adopted in order for people to keep themselves and others safe.

We are now looking at the new possibilities for asymptomatic testing, especially in universities and for the return of students after the new year. We are discussing that with clinical colleagues and the other Administrations in the UK, and we will do our best to keep Parliament updated. We are in early November, in the middle of a global pandemic, and we are speaking about the January term, so it is not possible to predict exactly what the best solution will be.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): It is a shame that the Government has been dragged into this position; for months, political parties across the chamber have been asking for testing to happen. If it had happened earlier, universities around the country might not have been in the situation that they were in earlier in the term.

I hope that the minister now recognises that we should not only test before Christmas; we need to test after Christmas, as well. We need that commitment today, so that the minister is not dragged to the chamber again to make it happen. We cannot afford students being treated in the way that they were treated earlier this year. Will the minister commit to that?

Richard Lochhead: I know that it is exceedingly unlikely, but should Willie Rennie ever find himself in government, he will find that he has to listen to the advice of clinical advisers. We must listen to scientific and clinical advice. We now have effective asymptomatic tests, which is why the UK Government, the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government and, perhaps, other Governments are adopting asymptomatic

testing—the test that we will use, in particular, which has been piloted.

Our message to students is that testing plays a role, but is not a panacea or the solution to keeping ourselves safe: we have to follow the advice, as well. Science and technologies are advancing all the time and it is important that we take advantage of that.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): The minister has said that the testing programme is a UK Government programme. Will he confirm whether the Treasury has agreed to meet the costs?

Richard Lochhead: My understanding is that that is being considered by the Treasury. Quite clearly, it is a UK programme that is working with our universities and the Scottish Government to deliver asymptomatic testing, with an allocation to Scotland of testing kits. It would therefore be really helpful were the UK Treasury to respond positively—soon—and confirm that it will step in and cover the costs.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I ask for complete clarity from the minister about his intentions for the testing that will follow beyond the Christmas break for returning students, many of whom are from other countries. What exactly are the intentions on testing when students return from abroad?

Richard Lochhead: As I have said, we are of course looking at testing as part of the return of students to our institutions after the new year. However, at the moment, we are concentrating on getting our students home safely for Christmas this term. I say to Liz Smith that the position is similar across the UK, because of the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

However, we will give as much clarity and notice as we can give, and we will ask universities to give as much clarity as possible to students about what to expect next term. We are working on that at the moment.

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): Many students will be basing their decision on whether to return home to stay with family this Christmas on a variety of factors, including financial ones. Will the minister ensure that student hardship funds are adequate, that funds are suitably prioritised for those who are most in need, and that students are aware that they can, in some circumstances, apply for the Scottish welfare fund?

Richard Lochhead: Yes. For many students, in particular those who have not been able to work due to the impact of Covid on the economy, it has been a tough time financially. That is why the hardship funds, including the additional hardship

funds that we introduced a few months ago, have been so valuable.

The £11 million that we brought forward for the higher education sector is largely available, although I am waiting for an up-to-date report on how much of it has been used. We are also paying close attention to the call on the student hardship funds in further education and our colleges. It is a very important issue, so I assure Bob Doris that we are keeping a close eye on it.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow) (Lab): I urge the minister to give detailed timescales, because young people and their families will be expecting that, and not that he will simply look at timescales at some point in the future.

Will the minister also clarify the advice on travel? If a student is travelling from a level 3 area such as Glasgow to a level 1 area such as Stornoway, is the general travel advice suspended for them? In addition, if students are advised that they cannot travel until after a particular date, what confidence can he give them that, if they wait, they will not be caught out if the levels that are assigned for particular areas, or the general travel advice, change?

Richard Lochhead: There are exceptions to the current travel guidance, for which students would qualify in getting to their education. However, our guidance is, of course, being updated to take into account the need for students to be able to return home for Christmas. That is the purpose of my announcement, and of the announcements across the rest of the UK.

On future arrangements, we will give as much notice as we can—albeit that we face the uncertainty of being in the middle of a global pandemic, and that it is not easy in November to give advice on what the situation will be in January. I assure Johann Lamont that we are conscious of the need to let families and students know what might be around the corner in respect of arrangements for students to return to their institutions.

Gail Ross (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP): How ready are colleges and universities to provide learning online for students who cannot, or do not want to, return to halls or shared accommodation after the Christmas break?

Richard Lochhead: There has been a huge shift to online learning and teaching in our colleges and universities. Clearly, however, that is not practicable for some courses, hence the case for keeping some face-to-face teaching over the past few months. However, some universities in particular have shifted a huge amount of their teaching online. When it comes to the plan for the safe return home of students at Christmas, the end of face-to-face teaching is anticipated in order

to give enough time for students to travel home, should they have to self-isolate for 14 days before Christmas.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes questions on the statement. I thank members and the minister for enabling all the questions to be answered in the time allowed.

Covid-19 Testing (Health and Social Care Workers)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Lewis Macdonald): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-23296, in the name of Monica Lennon, on routine Covid-19 testing for all health and social care workers.

15:25

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): The motion in my name

“notes the ongoing threat to life and health posed by COVID-19”.

Today, the First Minister informed the country that a further 64 people who had tested positive have now died from coronavirus. On behalf of Scottish Labour, I send condolences to everyone who has lost loved ones in recent days and throughout the pandemic.

Staff working right across health and social care are on the front line. We are all grateful for the care and support that they continue to provide to our constituents and our own friends and families. My motion calls on the Scottish Government to

“introduce routine weekly COVID-19 testing for all health and social care workers immediately.”

Eight months into the pandemic, it is unacceptable that such widespread testing is still not under way.

Healthcare workers are often characterised as heroes, but they do not have superpowers—they are human and they are at risk, too. That risk is to themselves, to their families and, of course, to the people for whom they care. Scottish Labour does not claim that testing is a panacea. We have consistently called for a package of measures, including improvements to personal protective equipment.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, national health service and social care staff have been asking for widespread testing to be carried out. Members of the Scottish Parliament, including Scottish Labour’s leader, Richard Leonard, have echoed their calls. I pay tribute to colleagues from other parties who have done so—including Alison Johnstone, for her persistent and consistent calls for mass testing.

Back in May, I asked the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport how many people had died after contracting Covid-19 in hospitals. We know that, during March and April, Covid-19 outbreaks led to ward closures and, sadly, the deaths of patients. We are now experiencing a second wave of the virus, and hospital-onset Covid remains a serious issue. According to figures published today by Public Health Scotland, there have been more

than 1,200 definite and around 360 probable hospital-onset cases. Therefore, identifying and containing the virus in hospitals is crucial if we are to protect patients and prevent such incidences.

Last week, we heard reports about a man whose father had apparently died after contracting Covid in Glasgow royal infirmary. He believes that his father had been exposed to Covid patients there. In a BBC interview, Professor Jackie Taylor stressed the need to control infections within hospitals. She said that

“testing all patients at the front door

is important

“because many don’t have typical symptoms.”

She also talked about the need for a

“coherent strategy for testing staff”.

Scottish Labour supports Donald Cameron’s amendment, which concerns a key measure on contact tracing. We are concerned about tracing performance times. Later today, my colleague Jackie Baillie will ask an urgent question, following on from journalist Chris Musson’s diligent reporting on tracing times. We will also be very interested in hearing the cabinet secretary give more detail on measures that would support not only the approach that is sought in my motion but the one that is set out in her own amendment.

I will mention a few issues that stakeholders have highlighted prior to the debate. The Royal College of Nursing Scotland has said:

“As a minimum, testing should be universally available to all staff, irrespective of whether they present with symptoms or have been caring for patients with COVID-19.”

Scottish Labour agrees that such tests need to be both available and accessible to staff where and when they need them.

Scottish Care has said that the testing of social care staff remains absolutely critical—most importantly, as a mechanism for identifying and minimising Covid-19 outbreaks. It also highlights the importance of testing availability and, crucially, turnaround times. Further, it recognises that testing can support loved ones to visit their families safely, keep staff safe and enable people to get the care that they deserve.

I make a plea to the cabinet secretary. We need to hurry up and connect family care givers with their loved ones, because people fear that they are running out of time. Like Scottish Care, we welcomed the commitments in the adult social care winter preparedness plan, and we need to see progress being made. The Coalition of Care and Support Providers in Scotland highlights that wellbeing is one of the health and social care standards that care providers are required to

meet. A key element is that those who are being supported feel safe and protected from avoidable harm. Routine testing would help to support that element for both supported people and staff. That point was echoed in a recent Care Inspectorate report.

I recall that one of my constituents in North Lanarkshire who was receiving care at home before Covid and in the early part of the pandemic had different carers coming into her home and felt that it was a game of Russian roulette. People do feel frightened, cabinet secretary.

The CCSP also notes that testing of those who are being discharged from hospital into care settings other than care homes—to sheltered housing, for example—is not standard. Our motion would address that. Cancer Research UK again stressed the importance of having Covid-protected safe spaces in our hospitals, and I think that we all agree that that is a really important issue, because cancer is the leading cause of death in Scotland. We should have routine, frequent and rapid testing of all NHS staff in primary and secondary care.

I am out of time, but I hope that today's debate is an opportunity to unite members in the chamber not just on the vital principle of expanding routine testing of all health and social care staff but on the need for urgent action. It is not enough just to praise our front-line healthcare staff; we need to protect them and the people they care for. Let us work together to make progress.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the ongoing threat to life and health posed by COVID-19 and the warnings of extreme winter pressures on the NHS, and calls on the Scottish Government to introduce routine weekly COVID-19 testing for all health and social care workers immediately.

15:31

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): I will start by making it clear that I agree with Ms Lennon's motion and Mr Cameron's amendment, and that all I seek to do with my amendment is to clarify that we will deliver the roll-out of regular asymptomatic testing to front-line NHS staff and social care workers on the basis of clinical advice. As members know, since 25 May, we have been undertaking weekly testing of care home staff, and the most recent figures, which were published today, show that a total of 41,569 staff were tested in the period between 2 and 8 November.

Broadly speaking, the weekly figures are running somewhere between 39,000 and 41,000 per week. Since 8 July, we have been routinely testing front-line NHS staff in oncology and haemato-oncology wards and in day-patient areas, including in radiotherapy, as well as in wards

caring for people over 65 years of age where the length of stay is over three months and in long-stay learning disability and mental health care.

Members will also know that we are actively scaling up our testing capacity to reach 65,000 tests per day, through a combination of NHS Scotland regional hubs and increased Glasgow Lighthouse capacity. I expect that capacity to increase still further as two additional measures come on stream.

Monica Lennon: I welcome what the cabinet secretary has said so far. Just so that we can get a sense of the scale of the challenge ahead of us, can the cabinet secretary say what proportion of NHS staff are being tested weekly at the moment, so that we have an idea of how far we still have to go?

Jeane Freeman: I cannot quite do the maths. It is not a huge proportion, but I can tell you that the estimate we have of NHS staff in emergency departments, as well as surgical and medical staff and front-line paramedics, is 132,500. The estimate that we have of care-at-home staff, including in housing support, in residential settings for learning disability and in personal assistance, is 82,000. That is in addition to some of the other groups that we will talk about.

The two measures that I mentioned are, first, the use of new technology such as robotics in the processing of tests, which increases the number of samples that can be processed—*[Interruption.]*—I am sorry, but I need to make progress. Secondly, we have the increased use of new test types that do not require lab processes but that give on-the-spot results. Indeed, my colleague Mr Lochhead spoke about some of those test types earlier today, which we will use for students before they return home at Christmas.

Those new test types have lower levels of sensitivity and specificity than the PCR—polymerase chain reaction—test. That does not mean that they have no value or use, but it means that they are not appropriate in certain circumstances or for certain uses, such as in clinical diagnosis, where the PCR test is the right one to use.

In October, we published the clinical and scientific review of our testing strategy, which set out clear clinical advice on the priorities that are to be followed, the most important of those being the clinical care of patients and responding to symptomatic demand. The review also set out how we should prioritise routine testing to mitigate the risk of asymptomatic transmission, with the aim of protecting those who are most vulnerable to the harshest impact of Covid-19.

There are a number of groups to be included as a result. NHS and social care front-line staff are

rightly there, alongside care home visitors, emergency admissions and professionals who visit care homes. As I have said in the chamber previously—I think that it was last week—I will come back before the end of this month to set out our clear plan with timescales, test type and test routes for the roll-out of asymptomatic testing to those groups.

I am acutely conscious of the importance not only of delivering on that clear commitment but of doing so in a way that is timely and sustainable. It is a significant logistical and planning exercise in which we need to ensure not only that we can test people but that our turnaround times in the lab processing channels that we use are as good as we need them to be.

I am aware of the time, so I will conclude. I do not think that we will find much disagreement between us in the debate. I am as impatient as everyone else is to have asymptomatic testing rolled out. However, I am as determined as I am impatient that we will do it properly and sustainably. I look forward to returning to the chamber with the plan.

I move amendment S5M-23296.3, to insert at end:

“, with prioritisation of staff groups to be guided by expert clinical advice.”

15:36

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): During the pandemic, we have seen a heroic effort from all our NHS and social care staff to cope with the demands and pressures that have come to the fore as a result of this unpredictable virus. However, as we enter the winter months, the pressures on our NHS and social care sector will undoubtedly intensify. We must ensure that our health and care services are fully equipped and best placed to deal with what comes along.

As Monica Lennon rightly identified, we must make full use of our testing capacity. In particular, we must test weekly all those who work on the front line of our NHS and our social care sector, because we know that, by doing that, we will protect workers, patients and residents in care homes.

At this juncture, I should mention the issue of testing family care givers, given the crucial importance of enabling safe visiting of our loved ones in care homes. I hope that the Scottish Government is actively considering that matter.

It is right that steps are being taken to increase testing capacity from the existing capacity of around 30,000 tests a day in accordance with the Scottish Government's strategy review on testing. We know that, although that capacity exists, it has

not always been fully utilised. Between 26 May and 17 August, the daily average number of tests carried out was only 7,500 or so, which fell well short of the amount of existing capacity at any given time. The cabinet secretary mentioned the most recent figures. In the week that has just passed, only 41,569 care home staff were tested out of approximately 53,000 staff. That means that more than 11,400 staff remain untested, which we think is unacceptable.

Jeane Freeman: Does the member accept that, in any given week, we will not have all 53,000-odd care home staff in care homes to be tested? Some will be off because they are unwell, some might be off because they are isolating, having been tested prior to that week, and some might be on holiday. Therefore, it is not possible to judge the success of care home worker testing by looking to see whether 100 per cent of staff are tested every single week. That is simply not reasonable.

Donald Cameron: If it is not reasonable, why did the cabinet secretary give assurances that all care home staff would be tested every week?

We know that that simply is not happening. In fact, the Scottish National Party Government has never met its target of testing all care home staff every week. According to the Coalition of Care and Support Providers in Scotland, none of the estimated 71,000 people who work in care at home are able to access routine testing. That simply is not good enough when we are talking about supporting our front-line workers and some of the most vulnerable people in our society, and it is a clear reminder of the risks that those on the front-line face every day while dealing with the virus.

In addition to increasing capacity and increasing the number of tests that are carried out, we need to be able to give people their results as quickly as possible.

Although regular and faster testing of staff is important, we must also ensure that our contact tracing capacity is able to cope with increasing demand during the winter months. That aim underpins our amendment. We learn in today's *Scottish Sun* that test and protect is failing to meet current expectations and is performing up to five times worse than was previously claimed, with data showing that, in the majority of weeks in September and October, test and protect staff failed to contact about half of positive cases within 24 hours of being notified.

We still do not know whether we have enough contact tracers in place to meet the growing demand. We urgently need an assurance from the Scottish Government that the system will be able to meet winter demand and that it will be able to trace people quickly, so that we can reduce the

spread of the virus. The system is meant to keep us safe, which is why our amendment says what it says about the contact tracing system.

We will support Scottish Labour's motion and the Scottish Government's amendment, and we hope that other parties will support our amendment. If we are to be able to control the spread of the virus, we must ensure that those who are most at risk—namely, our health and social care staff—are protected and that our contact tracing capabilities are sufficient to cope.

I move amendment S5M-23296.1, to insert after “on the NHS”:

“; recognises the need for the Test and Protect system to be able to provide rapid turnaround contact tracing and cope with increasing demand during the winter months”.

15:41

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): On 24 April, I wrote to the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport and said that I considered routine testing for hospital and care workers who were on the front line of the Covid-19 pandemic to be an urgent imperative, and I still do. At the time, I pointed to a paper published in *The Lancet* that set out the case for screening of health and care workers to prevent transmission, which confirmed that University College London hospital was piloting such testing to

“further limit nosocomial transmission and ... alleviate a critical source of anxiety for HCWs.”

It said:

“A healthy, COVID-19-free workforce that is not burned out will be an asset to the prolonged response to the COVID-19 crisis.”

What an asset our health and care workforce is.

It was right that we loudly applauded the efforts of our health and care workers from our doorsteps, but we must do much more. We should, of course, pay those hard-working people more and, as I said last week in the chamber, we owe them the protection that testing provides.

This week, NHS England has made testing available to all patient-facing staff. Staff will receive home kits to test themselves twice a week. Although those lateral flow tests have a lower specificity, all positive results will be checked with a PCR test, as the Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science announced will be the case regarding students.

I wrote to the First Minister on 14 May, when I pointed to Imperial College London research that advised that regular screening of health and care workers, irrespective of symptoms, could prevent up to a third of transmission. Reducing transmission by a third is huge. It is no surprise

that our proposal to test health and care staff enjoys widespread support, including from the Royal College of Nursing, Scottish Care and the Royal College of Emergency Medicine. Yet only last week, the First Minister said:

“the top priority for our testing capacity right now is people with symptoms, because that is how we ... break chains of transmission.”—[*Official Report*, 5 November 2020; c 11.]

However, that chain might have started with an asymptomatic carrier of Covid. We have known for months about the dangers of asymptomatic transmission, but we are still waiting for the virus to come to us.

Mark Woolhouse, the professor of infectious disease epidemiology at the University of Edinburgh, said in the press this week that we are still not finding out about half of the Covid cases in Scotland or the UK more generally, and that

“it's like trying to control the epidemic with one hand tied behind our back.”

He welcomed the testing pilot in Liverpool that seeks to solve that problem. Slovakia tested two thirds of its population in two days. When I raised that last week, the First Minister said that the testing in Slovakia was antibody testing. That is not the case; it is antigen testing.

It is true that we should question the specificity and sensitivity of tests, but we must also question why Scotland seems so very unambitious when it comes to testing. I have asked many times for increased testing for those on the front line and more broadly.

I wrote to the First Minister on the issue of mass testing in September, when I cited the availability of quick turnaround, low-cost tests. The technology is improving, but our testing numbers are not. In fact, the total number of daily tests that are carried out in Scotland has barely changed since the end of August. A frequent response is that the Government is prioritising its testing capacity, so let us look at that. The Scottish Government aims to expand its overall testing capacity to 65,000 tests per day by winter, but in the past week Scotland processed an average of only 18,700 tests per day. Yesterday, 10,499 tests were processed.

Scotland has been too slow to implement the level of testing that is needed. Although routine testing for care home staff was introduced on 25 May, routine testing is still not available for staff in far too many settings including, as our briefings for today's debate from the Coalition of Care and Support Providers in Scotland, Cancer Research UK and Scottish Care confirm, those in home care, those who support people with no homes or who are dealing with addiction issues, and staff

who are involved in the diagnosis and treatment of cancer.

I said it last week and I say it again: here we are in November, and someone could still be working in a Scottish hospital with Covid-19 and not even know it. It is unacceptable for those staff, the families they return home to and the patients they look after. I hope that the issue will be progressed at a pace that has been sorely lacking up to this point.

15:45

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): It is a great privilege to follow such an excellent speech from Alison Johnstone. I absolutely associate myself with her remarks.

The Liberal Democrats will support all the amendments to the motion and the motion itself. However, our acceptance of the Government's amendment is guarded, because I am anxious that the terminology that is used could belie a business-as-usual approach. Why would we not support the prioritisation of testing in our hospitals and care sectors? However, that has been the Government's default position since the start of the pandemic, and I do not believe that we can just continue as we have been. We are deep into the pandemic—

Jeane Freeman: Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I do not have much time, but I will take the cabinet secretary's intervention.

Jeane Freeman: If we do not use clinical prioritisation as the way to roll this out, what would the member suggest that we use?

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I refer to the cabinet secretary to my remark a moment ago. We accept the Scottish Government's amendment on that basis. We absolutely agree that, if the Government is rolling something out, it has to do it on a prioritised basis, but this Government has been prioritising things for months and we are still not testing everybody who needs to be tested.

Although there was a period of uncertainty at the start of the pandemic—in the foothills of the emergency—we now know that there are many who contract the virus but display no symptoms. They may never even know that they had it. That is why the best way to prevent a spike in infection in our hospitals, in our care homes and, crucially, as we have heard many times this afternoon, in care at home is to routinely test all staff, and with regularity.

Currently, a considerable number of health and social care workers are being tested, but there cannot be full confidence in the testing system

until we know that that is happening with universality. We ask a lot of those workers, and the emergency has tested them like nothing before. They do not need the anxiety that they may be an asymptomatic carrier of the disease and, by extension, a danger to their patients or the people they care for.

People who work in social care but cannot currently access routine testing include staff who provide care at home, as we have heard; those in palliative care, where we would imagine that testing was critical; those in respite care and day care services; those who support children and young people or people without a home; and those who work in residential rehabilitation for drug addiction.

The Coalition of Care and Support Providers in Scotland has been pressing for an expansion of routine testing for a long time, particularly for care at home. As we have heard, the Care Inspectorate estimates that 53,000 people work in care homes for adults and 71,000 people work in care at home. That is a huge group of people who are coming into contact with our most vulnerable citizens, many of whom were asked by this Government to shield for much of lockdown on a daily basis.

The pausing of cancer screening programmes during the first wave meant that, in Scotland, more than 100,000 people every month were no longer being screened for bowel, breast or cervical cancer. Although those services have restarted, it will be some time before the backlog has cleared. Cancer Research UK has called for routine, frequent and rapid Covid testing of all NHS staff in primary and secondary care to ensure that the restarting of those vital programmes happens and that we get the care that is needed to the people who have fallen behind in the prognosis of their condition.

Liberal Democrats and members across the chamber have been calling for a wider roll-out of testing for some time. We are now into winter and time is running out to upscale testing before the busy winter period and the drain on resources hits with full effect.

Alison Johnstone was absolutely right to say that Slovakia tested millions of people on the same day—and that it was antigen testing, not antibody testing, which is fast-track testing. We need to be more ambitious for Scotland. There is a pilot of mass testing in Liverpool and we know that testing is one of the strongest defences against the spread of the virus; it has to start with the testing of the people in health and social care on whom we depend.

The Scottish Government expects to be able to process 65,000 PCR tests a day from December,

which is welcome. However, the rate of expansion is not particularly fast.

I can see that I am running out of time. We know that the NHS is always under a lot of pressure in winter. We must do all that we can to mitigate that this year, more than ever. Testing all our health and social care staff is a good place to start.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. We are tight for time; I ask for four-minute speeches, please.

15:50

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): I put on record my thanks to all our NHS and care staff who continue to fight the virus on the front line, and I send my condolences and love to all those who have lost a loved one.

We have had good news this week, with the prospect of a vaccine coming soon. However, let us be honest. Eight months into the pandemic—eight months—we still have not fixed testing and we still have not fixed test and protect. The question now is whether we will have a vaccine or fix testing and test and trace first; that is the race. The vaccine was meant to be the end game, but it might well rescue us from failed testing and test and trace programmes.

Week after week, the Government has been asked about testing. Week after week, we have had promises. Week after week, people have been let down. Premiership footballers get tested every single week, but NHS staff, care home staff and care-at-home staff do not. We have all been sent images of NHS staff receiving bin liners to wear as aprons, as part of their PPE. That is not fair. The system is not working.

I have been constructive with the cabinet secretary, in public and in private, but we have to call a spade a spade. Testing and test and protect are not working. That is simply not good enough, and the Government has to get a grip.

We have heard tragic stories about cancer services—stories that would not have happened if testing was sorted. We have heard tragic stories about people not being able to visit loved ones in care homes—stories that would not have happened if we had sorted testing. Only now are we restarting dental services; we would not have those problems if we had sorted testing. We would not have the problems that we have seen on many university campuses if we had sorted testing.

We have to get testing sorted ASAP. I am talking about mass testing and rapid testing; if it is good enough for Liverpool, it is good enough for Glasgow and the rest of Scotland.

The Government keeps saying that test and protect is working—the First Minister said so when I spoke about the issue in the chamber a couple of weeks ago. I am sorry. There is a big difference between the claim that has been made in the chamber that three quarters of people are successfully traced and tested and the fact, which is that the proportion is less than half. Test and protect is not working. Too many people are not traced, too many people do not get the phone call and too many people are not given the advice that they need if we are to beat this virus.

As Monica Lennon said, what is happening in our hospitals is unacceptable. This week, I received an email from a distraught son, who said that his father had shielded for seven months—his family had stayed away from him for seven months and he could not see his children and grandchildren—after which he went to hospital for a heart scan, caught Covid in hospital and died. How is that acceptable? It is simply unacceptable.

Getting the test and trace programme and testing right can help us to fix the problems. I thank the Government for its communications exercise. We expect the Government to be brilliant at communications and we thank it for that, but we need it to be good at beating the virus, too. I ask the Government, please, to fix the testing system and test and protect, so that we can save lives in Scotland.

15:54

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): I welcome this debate and what the cabinet secretary said about how she wants to work with others to ensure that we can solve the issue.

I think that we can all agree that the continued health and safety of all our front-line health and social care workers is a key priority right now. Since the beginning of the pandemic, I have expressed my on-going gratitude to all those who work in that sector. I want to take a moment at the beginning of my speech to once again thank our brave and committed doctors, nurses, carers, porters and everyone else who works in health and social care. My heart also goes out to those who have lost a loved one during these difficult times.

As the pandemic has continued and we have tried to limit the spread of Covid-19 throughout our communities, the Scottish Government has made testing a priority for key workers and the public. It continues to prioritise the expansion of the NHS's testing capacity every day. It is important to note that Scotland's maximum weekday lab capacity is now more than 10,000 tests and that, at the very beginning of the crisis, we had the capacity for only 350 tests. At that time, the 350 tests per day

were split between Edinburgh and Glasgow. There has been an increase to 10,000 tests, with labs in all 14 health board areas alongside key partner nodes in academia and the private sector. All are operational and testing every single day.

Although the increase from 350 to 10,000 tests is exceptional, the Scottish Government is committed to building the lab processing capacity to at least 65,000 tests per day come winter. I know that all the new regional hubs that will go live between this month and next month will help us to move closer to that target and allow us to be less reliant on the United Kingdom Lighthouse lab network. *[Interruption.]* I do not have much time, so I cannot take an intervention. I am sorry.

Alongside massively increasing our national testing capacity to cope with the demand, weekly testing is already offered to all care home staff, regardless of whether they have symptoms or whether there is an outbreak in their home. Enhanced outbreak investigations are mandatory when cases are detected, and a test is offered to all care home staff. It is important that the Scottish Government continues to protect society's most vulnerable by focusing on those who are most likely to bring the virus into homes in the first place.

The data suggests that the uptake of testing is already quite good. Statistics that were published on 4 November show that 41,767 care home staff were tested in the latest reporting period. That is an increase of 2,000 from the previous week. The percentage of available staff tested was at least 72 per cent. I know that many members across the chamber will ask why the remaining 28 per cent were not tested. It is important remember that testing can take place only with the explicit consent of the staff and that all the staff would need to be present for that to happen in the first place, as opposed to being on annual leave or otherwise absent. I am not one for filling a speech full of statistics, but it is important to remember those key points when we are dealing with such a serious issue.

I know that people are sometimes reluctant to be tested for fear of testing positive and then having to isolate and miss work. In light of that, the Scottish Government has advocated a supportive approach when staff decline a test. It encourages employers to get to the root of the reason for refusal.

It is crucial to highlight that the Scottish Government has implemented routine testing for healthcare workers when the evidence has suggested that it is appropriate to do so. The current policy is that all asymptomatic healthcare staff are tested for Covid-19 if there is an outbreak in a previously Covid-free ward. Since 8 July, that approach has been extended to include staff who

work in the highest-risk areas of specialist wards, wards for the long-term care of the elderly and long-term psychiatric wards.

In order to combat the pandemic as safely and efficiently as possible, the Scottish Government has followed the advice of clinicians, scientists and professionals from the beginning. As we continue—we agree with one another today—we need to remember those specialists when we are dealing with the issue.

15:59

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): I welcome the opportunity to speak in this important debate.

As many people have noted in recent weeks and months, the pressure on the NHS this winter will be unprecedented. On top of the regular challenges that are faced over winter, Scotland is continuing its battle against Covid-19. The virus has already put immense strain on the NHS over summer and autumn. That pressure will only intensify as we enter the winter months.

In Glasgow and the surrounding area, we have already seen how the impact of Covid-19 is putting pressure on Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board's flu vaccination programme, with many vulnerable people having to wait for their flu jabs much longer than was anticipated. That is why Conservative members believe that in order to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 and to ease pressure on the NHS during the next crucial few months, more testing and faster contact tracing are essential, as we look to slow down transmission of the virus in our health and social care system.

Therefore, in the spirit of the Scottish Labour Party's motion, we urge the Scottish National Party Government to introduce routine weekly Covid-19 testing for NHS staff and social care workers who have been on the front line protecting the nation during this awful pandemic.

However, based on its record so far, I am seriously concerned that the SNP Government has a long way to go before it could realise that pledge. Since the crisis began in March, it has continuously failed to ramp up Scotland's testing capacity. Only last month did the SNP Government's review of its own testing strategy note that further work was required to speed up the pace of turnaround times, which could have allowed for quicker contact tracing and subsequent isolation of people who are considered to be close contacts. If that had been achieved, it would undoubtedly have reduced transmission. That important point lies at the heart of the Scottish Conservative's amendment.

Furthermore, from the beginning of the pandemic we have repeatedly called on the SNP to address shortcomings in Scotland's testing capacity, and we have offered constructive suggestions on how to do so. For example, we have called on the Government to increase the number of mobile testing units across the country, which would significantly bolster Scotland's testing capacity. Take-up at testing sites has been low, largely because of the distance that key workers must travel to get to them; more are therefore required to support people in rural areas and care homes.

I have serious concerns in relation to care homes and regular testing of staff. In July, the health secretary pledged that all care home staff would be tested weekly, but data shows that between 26 October and 1 November, approximately only 79 per cent of Scotland's care home staff were tested for Covid-19.

Warm words are all well and good, but action matters more. How are the Scottish people supposed to have faith in the SNP Government's ability to ramp up testing this winter for care home staff when it continually fails to meet its pledges? The SNP must finally get serious and focus its efforts on ensuring weekly routine testing for all care home staff. It owes that to Scotland's elderly and vulnerable population.

Let me take the opportunity to remind the SNP to abide by the vote in Parliament last week that called for the immediate establishment of a public inquiry to find out what has gone wrong in our care homes during the pandemic.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): There is a strict four minutes for speakers, now.

16:03

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): I first pay tribute to the scientists across the world who have been working night and day to find a vaccine, although we know that there is still a long way to go.

We can never repay the incredible efforts of our NHS staff and care workers, who have gone beyond the call of duty in looking after patients and saving lives, putting their own safety at risk through working in settings that have the sickest and most vulnerable patients, and where prevalence of the virus is high. Wearing the hard-fought-for PPE alone must be tiring for many NHS workers, but we are still calling for adequate regular testing for NHS and care workers. As the Royal College of Nursing has said, testing must be accessible to the workforce, so for them to be asked to take a test during their annual leave is disrespectful to that workforce.

More recognition is needed of the asymptomatic aspect of Covid-19 that enables it to spread so quickly. If that is not recognised in the system, we will be fighting a losing battle. Routine testing would be a recognition that the asymptomatic nature of Covid-19 might be why we are struggling to get it under control.

As we head into winter, there is a serious worry that our nurses and doctors are already at breaking point. A Unison report during the first wave of the virus highlighted that nearly 80 per cent of NHS staff said that were already tired, and 30 per cent said that they were very tired and were getting inadequate breaks. That is absolutely unacceptable. We must improve the conditions for our workforce in tackling the second wave, and we must keep them safe.

Particularly worrying is the suggestion that transmission of Covid-19 is not yet under full control in our hospitals. That is a failure of testing policy. Every other country in the world that has been successful against Covid seems to have signed up to the idea of mass testing.

Professor Jackie Taylor suggested that testing patients at the front door, irrespective of age and of whether they have typical symptoms, is an absolute must. That is the kind of ambition that we need. Not doing will impact more on delivery of non-Covid care. As Alison Johnstone said, other small countries including Slovakia have tested the entire population—two thirds of it in two days. Liverpool is doing mass testing, using the lateral flow system and lab testing. Here in Scotland, we seem to be behind the situation, and I would like to know why.

NHS 24 is also under pressure. We hear reports that staff have been absent for Covid-related reasons, and that those absences are critically impacting on service delivery, even as we rely on NHS 24 now more than ever.

The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow and the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh have jointly called for a national strategy to safely manage

"the competing pressures of treating patients with COVID-19, and those without COVID-19 who need urgent care or elective work".

This is where we are. As we speak, patients have had their consultations cancelled, many with no replacement dates and others with dates that are set well into the future. Patients who have managed their conditions through lockdown in anticipation of having an operation are now extremely worried that their care is being put off indefinitely.

Only with a Covid-free workforce that is well looked after will we have any chance of getting our NHS back into looking at physical care.

We need to go back to a system in which patients feel that they can challenge not having an appointment, or their critical care not being dealt with. The Government must give the positive clear message to patients that the NHS still serves them.

16:07

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I am pleased to speak in the debate. I was going to offer some statistics, but George Adam and others have done so, in regard to the Scottish Government's 10,000 tests, and testing of health workers, which is very important.

The debate is about testing. I am going to talk from personal experience. I want to thank all the workers in the hospitals, from the cleaners and porters all the way through to specialists and nurses. I also thank care workers. It is a very difficult situation that everyone finds themselves in.

I know of one person who tested negative. Were they asymptomatic? I do not know. Unfortunately, that person did get Covid. At the time they tested negative, so although the debate is about testing, we have to look at other issues as well. I am quite anxious that if we say that everyone has to be tested every week, or even every couple of days, the other measures to keep the virus under control will be forgotten. I do not mean to say anything against testing, but I think that we need also to look at the other issues.

Care homes have been mentioned a number of times, including by Annie Wells. We have already seen the difficulties in huge care homes and the difficulties in private care homes. With regard to lack of hygiene, we know all about the situation that has been raised in press coverage in relation to a certain privately owned care home, which is one of the biggest privately owned care homes in Scotland and the UK. We need to take that part of the care homes situation out of the debate.

I do not know whether anyone in the chamber knows anyone who has had a test. If they do, they will understand that it is difficult to get an elderly person with dementia to take one, and we cannot force them. Any care home provider or assistant, or anyone who works in a hospital, will say how difficult it is. The test does not involve just a small swab in someone's mouth; it goes right down the back of their nose and near enough into their throat. We have to remember that. I am not saying that we should not test—I am supportive of the motion and the amendments—but we have to consider the realities of the situation.

The only thing that will stop Covid is people listening to the expert guidance. Testing is important, but for me—not only for me, but for

experts and others—testing is not a panacea. A vaccine will be a panacea, but we have to get through this situation until we get the vaccine.

We have to look at the guidance. We have to test, and we have to follow that through, but we must also be vigilant with regard to hygiene, shielding and looking after our older people, and we must not move people about from one care home to another. Testing will not stop infection if the people who provide care do not look after their workers and the people who are living in care homes. I wanted to get that point across, because it is important. Testing is not a panacea; it is a method that must be used along with other things.

16:12

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Given the excellent speeches that we have heard, I propose to keep my speech relatively short.

I always judge leaders on whether they would take the same risks as they ask people to take on their behalf. That is the mark of a good leader, and it is how I judge the difference between a good leader and a bad leader. The reality is that patient-facing health workers were three times more likely than any other working-age adults in Scotland to be admitted to hospital with Covid-19 during the first wave of the pandemic. We know that the risk of transmission is greater for health workers, so we must do everything that we can to reduce that risk.

Routine and reliable testing is a vital layer of protection that promises not only to limit the spread of the virus, but to protect the people who are protecting us. We simply cannot afford to have Covid outbreaks in our national health service, because it means that scheduled elective surgeries and other treatments have to be suspended. For example, we cannot afford an increase on the 4,355 operations that have been cancelled in NHS Highland in the past six months alone.

The SNP Government must ensure that all front-line health staff are given the urgent support, including routine testing, that will ensure that operations continue. That routine testing must also be rolled out to care home workers, as it is being, and to care-at-home workers. It is not just personal protective equipment that they need to protect themselves and the people whom they care for from the pandemic; they also need testing.

I want to give members an example that was given to me by a care-at-home worker. Imagine, for a moment, what it must be like to be a care worker who looks after an elderly lady who suffers from dementia and requires help going to the

toilet, but who rails against her care workers as they get her undressed because she does not understand why they are doing it. In that moment of drama, which happens in the morning and in the evening, the care worker's PPE is accidentally ripped off, so there could be transmission of the virus, either to the lady who is being looked after or to the care worker, and one of those people might well die as a result of it. The care worker might not know that they have been infected until the weekly test is completed—that is, if it happens at all.

Let us not forget that the SNP Government has never met its pledge on testing. Our care workers should not be put in that position and the Government must ensure that routine testing is made available to all care-at-home workers, whether it is done by the NHS or privately. It is not fair to ask private companies and employees to pay for testing over and above the routine testing that they are given.

We are now in the second wave of the pandemic. I believe that the Scottish Government has a huge duty to protect all our healthcare professionals, care workers and care-at-home workers from the pandemic. It cannot carry out that duty if there is no roll-out of routine testing. My simple message to the Government is that it should stop the warm words and the good public relations and instead get on with doing what we know is the right thing to do.

16:15

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): I begin by acknowledging the incredible efforts of our NHS and care staff, who continue to be on the front line caring for patients with Covid-19 and working to prevent further spread in hospitals and care homes. This debate is not abstract for me; I have family and friends doing those crucial jobs, as do others in the chamber, and I am hugely grateful to them for all that they do under really difficult circumstances. Current estimates from the Care Inspectorate are that more than 53,000 staff work in care homes for adults, compared with more than 71,000 staff who work in care at home. As we have heard, weekly testing is offered to all care home staff, regardless of whether they have symptoms or whether there is an on-going outbreak in their care home.

The Scottish Government has implemented routine testing for healthcare workers where the evidence says that it is appropriate to do so, but there are social care staff who cannot currently access routine testing. They include staff providing care at home; supported living and housing support services; palliative care; support and care for children and young people; support for people with no homes or dealing with addiction issues;

and respite and day services, although not all those services are running at the moment.

The safety of those workers, as well as of the people who are in their care, must be paramount. It is important to acknowledge, as the briefing from CCSP does, that third sector providers kept infection rates to a minimum from March through to the end of August without routine testing, through careful risk assessment and use of infection prevention and control. Routine testing is important, but it is only part of the picture. I understand and support the calls for it—it intuitively feels like the right thing to do—but it absolutely must be led by evidence. It is important to remember that testing provides a single-point-in-time assessment of whether someone has the virus; it does not mean that they will not go on to develop the virus.

Alison Johnstone: The Scottish Government's testing strategy and its nosocomial review group have recognised the importance of routine testing for healthcare workers, so I do not see why there is still a question of prioritising certain staff groups over others. Is it not long past time that we immediately got on and introduced it as a matter of urgency?

Ruth Maguire: Alison Johnstone has consistently made those points, in her speech and before in the chamber, and she has done so again.

It is important to note that some staff who are eligible for a test decline to take it up and they cannot be forced to take a test. In the short time that I have, I want to talk about the barrier that losing income can be for people and how that can affect how they choose to act—if, indeed, it is a choice for low-paid workers. I welcome the fact that the Scottish Government has established a social care staff support fund to ensure that care workers who test positive for Covid-19 will receive sick pay above the current statutory level of £95.85 a week. That should go some way towards helping to ease the financial burden that having to isolate places on them.

It is absolutely crucial that employers also act responsibly and fulfil their duties with regard to the health and safety of their staff, and that workers are actively encouraged to follow guidance and are not pressured into coming in. I have heard about cases in which that has not happened right away and I urge workers to know their rights and speak up when they feel that things are not right. I reiterate that employers must fulfil their duties and must not put their staff in harm's way.

I support evidence-led routine testing for all our health and social care staff.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to closing speeches.

16:19

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I remind members that I have a daughter who is on the front line in the Scottish NHS. As I rise to close on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives, I thank the Labour Party for using some of its debating time to bring this important debate to the chamber.

As one might imagine, there is much agreement among members on all sides of the chamber as regards the incredible debt of gratitude that we owe our NHS and our health and social care workers for their dedication and compassion. Those attributes have been highlighted specifically during the pandemic, but we need to remember that that is how those workers behave throughout their careers.

Members also agree that routine weekly Covid-19 testing for all health and social care workers would be a good thing, as it would protect not only front-line staff but the patients whom they look after. Monica Lennon began her speech by reminding members that Covid remains life-threatening, and I am sure that we would all want to send our condolences to all those who have lost loved ones to the virus.

The issue is not just testing capacity but the Scottish Government's ability to deploy and utilise that capacity. For example, are there enough qualified personnel on the ground? It is also about the ability to turn the tests around and deliver the results timeously.

As has been pointed out in the debate, capacity has been ramped up too slowly, and capacity is going unused. As we all know, there are far too many messages from our constituents telling us that testing for our front-line health and social care workers is sporadic. The truth of the matter is that the Scottish Government was unprepared, despite all the warning signs from around the globe as the virus made its way towards us. We have been all too aware of the PPE shortages and the scramble to find ways to fill the gap.

Donald Cameron's amendment highlights contact tracing as a key weapon in tackling Covid-19, as it offers the ability to isolate those who may have been in contact with the virus and thereby break the infection cycle. Donald Cameron also alluded to the fact that data from the Government are not necessarily always consistent and accurate; if the public is to have confidence in the programme, that will have to change.

We were all aware of the likelihood that a second wave was going to happen, and yet after eight months we still have not got the testing regime right. I would have hoped and expected that by now, the Scottish Government's response would be a bit more sophisticated and comprehensive than it actually is. By now, we

should have been making the case for testing all our teaching staff and our other emergency services. What about our military personnel abroad, especially those who will be coming home for Christmas? We could throw in students too, who are struggling just now in trying to get home for Christmas, and the family care givers who visit our nursing homes.

The reality is that there has been a lack of forward planning and that the Scottish Government is still too reactive, rather than proactive, in tackling the virus. The virus may have been unpredictable, but it is entirely predictable that we would need testing capacity and the ability to deploy it.

The cabinet secretary mentioned that we will require 200,000 tests per week in the health service before we start to consider testing for the groups that I mentioned. Anas Sarwar made the point that the vaccine could be here before the issues with testing and test and protect are resolved.

Not only should the Scottish Government introduce routine weekly Covid-19 testing for all our health and social care workers but it should have been done long before now. The problem is that I am not sure, even after all that we have learned about the virus in the past eight months, that the Scottish Government could do that even if it wanted to.

16:23

Jeane Freeman: To respond to Brian Whittle's point, we not only can do it—we will do it.

I, too, express my thanks to all our health and social care staff and our emergency workers, and I offer my condolences in particular to the families of those health and social care staff who have lost their lives to the virus.

In my opening remarks, I said that I did not expect much disagreement in the debate. That has largely proved to be the case, but members have tripped over some inaccuracies and—I think—unreasonable assertions that I assume were made as a political point, so I will clarify some of those.

On test and protect, I point out that the World Health Organization's target calls for

"At least 80% of new cases"

to

"have their close contacts traced and in quarantine within 72 hours of case confirmation."

The most recent figures published by our independent statisticians to 8 November show that 95.8 per cent of contact tracing of all positive cases is completed within 72 hours.

It is not fair to test and protect staff to assert that they are not performing well—they are performing very well—nor is it accurate to assert that we do not have enough of them, because we have 2,221 fully trained contact tracers.

Let me clarify the routes for testing—and I think that we have done this before. Those routes matter—this is not a point made for the sake of it. We have two routes for testing: either through the United Kingdom's Lighthouse lab or through the NHS labs. The route to the UK Lighthouse lab is through the regional testing centres, the mobile testing units and the local walk-through centres. Those are for symptomatic individuals.

We have a satellite route through the UK lab, which is the one that we have been using for care home workers who are asymptomatic. Although the turnaround times at the UK Lighthouse lab have improved for all other routes, the improvement has not been enough, or has not been sustained enough, for the satellite route and for home care. That is why we are moving care home worker testing to our own NHS labs. The other route is through NHS labs, which can cover asymptomatic individuals and where the turnaround times are consistently at or under 24 hours.

As members have indicated, roll-out by clinical prioritisation, for just two of the groups that we have mentioned, means totals of 82,000 or thereabouts for care-at-home staff and at least 132,500 for NHS staff if we prioritise that group—although we want to ensure that we include our paramedic workforce, too, along with care home relatives, visiting professionals and emergency admissions, which is particularly important for ensuring that, when an emergency admission comes into the acute setting, it will follow either the green non-Covid pathway or the red Covid pathway. That in itself contributes to a reduction in nosocomial infections. The roll-out of asymptomatic testing is undoubtedly important, and it is very important for that group, as well as the others. As I said earlier, I look forward to returning to the chamber before the end of the month to deliver our plan for just that.

The Government is happy to support both the motion and Mr Cameron's amendment.

16:27

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): SNP members who have spoken in the debate have been defensive, but I do not think that there is a need to be defensive. Monica Lennon is calling for all healthcare workers to be tested on a routine and weekly basis. Surely that is something that we would all want to strive for. Sandra White said that we need to consider the realities and that

"testing is not a panacea."

Nobody is claiming that testing is a panacea, but let us remember that RCN Scotland has written to every MSP. This is not about party politics. The Royal College of Nursing has said:

"Routine Covid-19 testing for health and care professionals is an absolute must. Our members need this in order to do their job while keeping themselves, and their patients, safe."

We have previously called for wider routine testing of all health and care workers in order to improve the identification and containment of potential COVID outbreaks. As a minimum, testing should be universally available to all staff, irrespective of whether they present with symptoms or have been caring for patients with COVID-19. Without this, health and care staff cannot be safe nor can they be deployed safely or effectively."

I say to the cabinet secretary that that is not playing politics; that is about ensuring that healthcare staff who are on the front line are properly protected. That is all that we are asking the Government for.

I accept that these times are very difficult, and I accept that the role of the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport is massive at this stage. I praise the cabinet secretary for the work that she has done and is doing throughout the pandemic but, when it comes to testing, the situation is simply not good enough, and it must improve.

The health secretary said that there are logistical and planning challenges. I have no doubt that there will be, but are we using all the resources that are available? The Prime Minister had a press conference the other day and I noticed that he had the head of the army there, who oversaw the logistics in Liverpool that had put in place all those testing centres. Do we ideologically oppose the use of the military or will we do the same as the UK Government and start to bring in all those who can help us to get the logistics right?

Anas Sarwar talked about the possibility of the Covid vaccine. The health secretary knows—because she intervened—that it was utter chaos in Fife when they tried to organise the flu vaccine: a letter was sent out and there was only one phone line to answer thousands upon thousands of calls, which unnecessarily worried loads of pensioners.

I agree that we need to get the logistics correct, which means that we need to be willing to reach out and consider where the best practice is across the UK and Europe that we could take and build on. The point that Alison Johnstone has repeatedly made is that we have seen—through the World Health Organization's recommendations and the situation throughout Europe—that we need to test, trace and isolate, so why does Scotland seem to be behind most of Europe and England when it comes to testing? The clear

message that must come from today is that we need to ramp up our testing.

Anas Sarwar made another point about vaccine and testing coming together. I made this point yesterday when I said to the First Minister that I, like everyone, welcome the potential of a vaccine by the end of this year, but I know that major hurdles are still to be overcome before we start to see the roll-out of the vaccine.

We should not take our eye off the ball; we need to massively improve our testing and our capacity to test. The health secretary's job must be one of the toughest in Scotland right now so I will work alongside her, but the message from today is that we have to get better at testing.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on routine Covid-19 testing for all health and social care workers.

Covid-19 Support (Tourism and Hospitality)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-23299, in the name of Richard Leonard, on additional support for Scotland's tourism and hospitality sectors during the Covid-19 pandemic.

16:32

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests.

This week, we have all welcomed a message of hope. There is a prospect, at last, of a Covid-19 vaccine on the horizon that offers hope in place of fear. In Scotland, another fear still hangs over us—that of mass unemployment, business collapse, savings gone, rising debts and deepening depression. That is the fear that keeps people awake at night. It afflicts too many of Scotland's businesses and working people and, in particular, too many of Scotland's hospitality and tourism businesses and workers.

Those businesses face a huge drop in trade and demand and now also carry substantial debts, which include those to Government that arose from loans that were taken out in the first half of the year—in Scotland, that was almost 80,000 loans totalling £2.1 billion. We need to reschedule that debt repayment and write off some of that debt.

In the weeks to come, the Scottish national investment bank will finally open its doors. The new bank's purpose must not just be to attract footloose, foreign direct investment, but to be there first and foremost for the indigenous business base at its time of need. That must be its priority.

To the commercial banks, we say, "Just as we were there for you to keep afloat jobs, and even entire banks, in the global financial crash, we now expect you to be there for us to help keep afloat jobs and businesses in the wider economy in the face of the crisis."

Over the past six months, restaurants in the central belt have experienced the first lockdown, the lifting of restrictions with social distancing measures in place, the eat out to help out programme in August, which boosted demand for at least the first half of the week, the subsequent central belt circuit breaker, and now tier 3 restrictions. The imposition of rule after rule would be confusing even if it had been plotted from the start of the year, but it had not. In the words of the First Minister, it has been "ad hoc".

Of course, we all recognise the unpredictability of current circumstances, but the Government's response to each wave of the pandemic has been imposed without a clear exit strategy, leaving businesses and workers fearful of what might come next. Time after time, we have seen a complete failure to communicate, consult and share the evidence, and a complete failure to respect the business community and the workers who are affected. Businesses cannot be turned on and off like a tap, and they should not be treated as though they can. The restaurant owners whom I met in Glasgow recently explained how their bills do not stop, even though they are wholly or partially closed. Many of them shed half of their workforce in the first lockdown, and more have gone since. That is why we say that the case for additional support for those jobs, businesses and entire industries is unanswerable, and that is why we oppose the Scottish National Party amendment to our motion. The Scottish people are doing their bit, so the Scottish Government must do its bit as well.

This afternoon, Scottish Labour is calling for an immediate review of the level of hardship support and business grants that are currently available, and for additional support to be provided. Unions and business leaders must be involved in that process, and we will support the Tory amendment on that basis.

Additional grants should be conditional on the businesses that receive them respecting their workers, with standards such as those set out in the Unite hospitality charter: a real living wage; rest breaks; equal pay for young workers; transport after midnight; minimum-hours contracts; anti-sexual harassment policy; proper consultation on changes to rotas; 100 per cent tips to staff; and trade union recognition.

I have heard it said, and I read in the Scottish Government's strategic framework document, that the Scottish Government

"will not be able to protect every business; and financial support cannot replace all lost income or save every job."

Scottish hospitality alone employs more than 9 per cent of Scotland's workforce, which is more than 250,000 workers. The industry is worth more than £10 billion to the Scottish economy, so I get that all that income cannot be replaced, but those businesses and workers want a Government that is on their side, is prepared to find additional support, and is prepared to back, not oppose, the Tied Pubs (Scotland) Bill, which would provide statutory protection for tied pub tenants at a time when they need it more than ever.

Today is a chance for the Parliament to come together, come in on the side of businesses that are under intense pressure, and show working

people across Scotland that we want to defend jobs, are serious about a fair work Scotland, and are on their side when they need us most. Today is a chance to show that we are in partnership with the people, are doing our bit as a Parliament, and are prepared to back a message of hope for the future with action and practical support now.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises the need to protect the population from the COVID-19 pandemic; appreciates the damage that tighter restrictions are having on Scotland's tourism and hospitality sector; calls on the Scottish Government to provide additional support to these sectors by reviewing the eligibility for COVID business grants and hardship grants and increasing available funding so that no hospitality or tourism business faces closure or job losses as a result of the pandemic, and considers that there is a need to work with trade unions to ensure that ongoing government support is being used to protect and improve workers' terms and conditions.

16:39

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Tourism (Fergus Ewing): There is surely no member who does not recognise the scale of the devastation that the virus has wreaked on Scotland's tourism and hospitality sector. Since March, when Covid struck and the lockdown began, the impact on individuals, businesses and lives has been devastating. I doubt that there is any member who has spent more time since March than me in engaging with and reaching out to people whose lives have been impacted in that way. *[Interruption.]* No, I will not take an intervention—I have just started.

I am absolutely determined to continue with that work, as are my parliamentary colleagues.

This week, we have heard good news on a potential vaccine. However, even with a vaccine, the impact of the virus will be measured in years, not months. Businesses in the sector—from leading visitor attractions to the smallest Highland pub—are now unsure whether they will survive to the spring. From the beginning, the Scottish Government has recognised the scale of the impact on businesses and the need to provide adequate support for business survival.

It has not been possible—as Richard Leonard appeared to imply that it should have been—for us to simply replicate every pound of revenue that businesses have lost. It is practical to aim to provide sufficient lifeline business support to help businesses survive, and that realistic target is the one that we have pursued. I am absolutely confident that businesses recognise that realistic objective and our determination to deliver. *[Interruption.]* No, I cannot give way. I must make progress, as I have very little time.

The Scottish Government has invested £2.3 billion in business support. The non-domestic rates-based retail, hospitality and leisure grant scheme, which is helping those businesses that are most affected, has allocated more than £1 billion. Larger hotels have been allocated £14 million, with £4 million provided to smaller bed and breakfast and self-catering businesses. *[Interruption.]* Tory members are muttering under their breath, as usual, but I assure them that that support has been truly appreciated by businesses. I know that, because I have been speaking to them.

Our pivotal enterprise resilience fund has provided funding for businesses with a rateable value in excess of £51,000. When I suggested that and my colleagues agreed that it should be provided, it was in recognition of the fact that many hotels have rateable values of more than £51,000 and that they would not have access to any grant finance. The scheme was provided in Scotland—it was not matched in England—and it met the gap for many family businesses and hotels that would not otherwise have navigated this difficult time.

However, more needs to be done. The task is not done, because the tunnel that we are in has proven to be longer than any of us hoped and, although there is some light at the end, we are not there yet.

The tourism recovery task force brought together 30 key stakeholders, including our trade unions, to consider how we can best ensure the sector's survival. Its recommendations provide a framework for recovery, and they chime well with the valuable work that is being done by, for example, the Unite the Union's hospitality and tourism rescue plan. I hope that, when it comes to voting, Scottish Labour will support our amendment's reference to the good work that is being done by Unite.

We can work only with the levers that we have, and they are not enough.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must conclude.

Fergus Ewing: We will continue to provide urgent support to the tourism sector, which I care deeply about.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab) rose—

Fergus Ewing: I have worked with people such as Jackie Baillie on numerous occasions, and I will continue to do so, even if I cannot take her intervention.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: While you are at it, cabinet secretary, keep on the good side of the Presiding Officer, too. You did not move your amendment.

Fergus Ewing: I move amendment S5M-23299.2, to leave out from “calls” to end and insert:

“acknowledges the significant contribution that tourism and hospitality makes, not only to the economy but to the health and wellbeing of workers, and to the cultural vibrancy of Scotland; notes the funding packages and job retention schemes offered by the Scottish and UK governments so far, but recognises that much more needs to be done to protect jobs and businesses into the future, including an extension to the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme beyond March 2021, noting that Scottish Government analysis shows an extension to June could save up to 61,000 jobs; welcomes the independent recommendations of the Tourism Recovery Task Force, and calls on the Scottish and UK governments to consider in full the recommendations, including ‘to progress alternative options for robust Testing Regimes’ for industry, and to provide ‘proportionate, fair financial compensation arrangements if further lockdowns are required’; notes the valuable work and representation of trades unions, including Unite the Union's Hospitality and Tourism Rescue Plan, and asks the Scottish and UK governments to meet urgently with them to discuss proposals for the protection of workers’ pay and conditions during this difficult time, and, recognising the pressures facing the industry on a UK-wide basis, calls on all governments in the UK to work closely together with the sector, health experts and unions to ensure that jobs, workers conditions and businesses can be protected and strengthened as we work through and emerge from the coronavirus pandemic.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Oliver Mundell. I gave Richard Leonard a little extra time, so I will compensate you as well, Mr Mundell.

16:44

Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con): Scotland's hospitality and tourism sector has been in crisis since the pandemic began. Although the vaccine brings hope to many, there is continued uncertainty for others with a long, cold, dark winter ahead. Thousands of jobs remain at risk, with a growing number of businesses teetering on the edge, having burned through financial reserves and the capacity to borrow.

Although the United Kingdom Government's extension of furlough has been widely welcomed, and represents an unprecedented level of support, the question now is whether many of the businesses in the hospitality and tourism sector and its supply chain will be here in the spring in order to re-employ people.

That is why it is so important that the SNP Government stops picking fights with the UK Government and prioritises getting the money that it has already had out of the door, in order to protect jobs and businesses in every sector and region of Scotland. Time is of the essence. That is why we are supporting Labour's motion, and feel that the SNP Government's amendment is simply an attempt to distract attention from its failure to properly consult and engage with the sector, or to deliver on the funding schemes that it has

pledged. Of course it can call for more resources from other Governments but, before doing so, it has to demonstrate a commitment to using the funds that it has already received, to back those vital jobs and businesses.

Turning to the Conservative amendment, I increasingly believe that a business advisory council is essential as we move forward, along with meaningful trade union engagement, because I have no doubt that poor consultation and the tick-box approach that have been adopted by the Government on the introduction of new measures are playing a significant role in creating unnecessary problems and flashpoints.

If the process were formalised and made more transparent, perhaps the Scottish Government would feel under more obligation to listen to those on the front line of the growing jobs and economic crisis in which we find ourselves, and perhaps it would be willing to explain the reasons for discounting some of the productive suggestions that have come forward.

Of course, the Scottish Government is right to say that new public health measures remain the priority. No one disputes that, not even those who are seeing their livelihoods put at risk. The question is how things are implemented, and whether the financial support that is being put in place reflects the pain and hardship that the SNP Government and, by association, the Parliament is asking those in the hospitality and tourism sector to absorb. As one leading hotelier said to me just last night, requests for additional support are not about greed; they are purely about survival. We cannot afford to let one of the mainstays of our economy, and the many jobs that it supports, be put at risk.

As I get through what is a short speech, I simply ask fellow MSPs: do we want to unite around a clear and simple motion, as is proposed, with a reasonable addition to highlight the importance of the wider supply chain and the need to engage with employers as well as unions, or do we want to allow a Government that has been slow to listen to rewrite the message that the debate sends?

If we believe that the hospitality and tourism sector and its supply chain are important, now, more than ever, they need to know that the Parliament has their back. Scotland is rightly proud of the outstanding businesses, attractions and opportunities on offer, and we must all do our bit to make sure that that vibrancy is protected for years to come.

I move amendment S5M-23299.1, to insert at end:

“; recognises that the supply chain for hospitality and tourism is also negatively affected and needs support, and calls on the Scottish Government to establish a coronavirus

business restrictions advisory council to support Scottish jobs as well as protect public health.”

16:48

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in the debate, and I am very pleased that the Labour Party has chosen to lodge a motion on the topic for debate.

As others have said, we are all painfully aware of the impact that the pandemic has had on the hospitality sector, on tourism and on the people who work in those businesses. A survey that I carried out in my constituency showed that 80 per cent of respondents who work in the sector are working fewer hours; half are extremely concerned about their income security and jobs; and a great many either are calling on the Government to support employers to pay the real living wage or are already looking for work elsewhere and do not see that they can have a future with decent prospects while working in the industry.

We need to take that reality very seriously. However, we also need to see it in context. The industry has a very long track record of endemic low wages and exploitative working conditions. We need to be realistic about the need to drive up standards. Those employers that have taken a responsible approach to issues such as the living wage should not become the ones that are tipped over the edge and lost.

When I first saw the motion, I was a bit surprised that it does not go into much detail about matters that Richard Leonard mentioned in his contribution. Those include the great work that Unite hospitality has done—not only in its charter but in the tourism and hospitality rescue plan that it has produced. Therefore, I lodged an amendment stating that, although some of those actions concern reserved matters, others clearly concern devolved ones that the Scottish Government could and should take forward. I hope that members will agree with the content of my proposed amendment, even though it was not selected for debate.

I worry about the intentions behind the Scottish Conservatives' amendment and the possibilities that it suggests. The kind of advisory group that it calls for would end up simply becoming a lobby group against the public health measures that we know are necessary. If the question were how best to implement or to mitigate such measures, I could understand that. However, I am deeply concerned that such an advisory group carries the risk of becoming a lobby group within the Government against public health measures.

The Government's amendment addresses some of the issues that I have mentioned, including the

work of Unite hospitality. I might well have found myself voting for it had it not also asked us, uncritically, to welcome the recommendations of the industry's task force. Far too many of the recommendations in the task force's report were just reheated grievances from the Scottish Tourism Alliance. The report calls for the abolition of air passenger duty. Do we really think that that is the reason for the pandemic having had such an impact on tourism and hospitality? Of course not. The report also calls for the abolition of the transient visitor levy. That is not yet in force, and no local authority is even close to proposing its use. Such issues are therefore a distraction. The only mention of wages that I could find in the report was a call for a relaxation of the requirements for the living wage. Perhaps that is what we get when a task force has 36 members, only two of whom represent the workforce—the people who actually work in the industry.

I am afraid that I will be voting against the amendments, but I will support the motion. I hope that members across the chamber will support many of the issues that Scottish Greens raised in our proposed amendment, even though it is not being pressed to a vote.

16:52

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): One of the joys of representing North East Fife is the fact that so many creative people have transformed the local tourism and hospitality offer. They include the operators of the Michelin-starred Peat Inn, Muddy Boots family farm at Balmalcolm, St Andrews Farmhouse Cheese Company at Anstruther, Lindores Abbey Distillery and many more businesses across the area. They are innovative people who have invested their money and their hearts into making their businesses a success.

I cannot name them all—indeed, I have deliberately left some out because they are really struggling and do not need the attention just now. I have helped many of them to get grants, and I am grateful for engagement from the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Tourism to make that happen.

However, despite such help, many businesses are now on the edge. It could be only a matter of weeks before they collapse. If they do so, we will have lost good businesses that make money, employ people and pay the taxes that in turn pay for our public services. However, we will have lost even more than that—the innovators and businesspeople who might not try again. Even if they do, it will take an age for them to get back up

to the level of economic activity that we need. Therefore the clock is ticking.

Earlier this year, we invested so much to keep such businesses alive through grants, the furlough scheme and the self-employment income support scheme. The UK Government has finally listened to pleas to extend the furlough scheme, but it needs to go further and extend it for even longer. I just do not believe that businesses will deliberately go into hibernation when they could be operating and earning a profit. We need more to be done on grants, to help the missing millions who have been excluded from financial support.

Fergus Ewing: I assure Mr Rennie that I entirely agree with what he has said thus far. The Scottish Government is committed to providing further lifeline assistance to businesses. It recognises that that is necessary in addition to the furlough scheme. It is working as a matter of urgency, and with that aim as its top priority, on providing a fair package to achieve that objective.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Rennie, you will get your time back.

Willie Rennie: That is encouraging to hear and I hope that that becomes a reality, but I think that the cabinet secretary will forgive the Parliament for wanting to put on a little bit more pressure to make that happen. That is why I will be supporting the Labour motion today and I am afraid that I will not be supporting the cabinet secretary's amendment, because I think that we need to put a little bit more pressure on the Government to make this happen. I fear for these businesses and I think that, by voting for the Labour motion today, we will make sure that that emphasis is there.

I understand why the finance secretary has mirrored the Westminster packages of support; it is probably the best way of guaranteeing that Westminster covers the costs of those grants here. However, we need a review of the current grant schemes, as too many businesses are losing out. Businesses without premises were unable to get grants through the business rates scheme. Businesses that are not required to close but find that their activity is so restricted that they might as well close get the hardship fund, but that is less than a third of what is provided to businesses that are closed.

Passenger agents—local holiday booking agents—have stayed open throughout the pandemic because they have spent the past few months getting money back for their customers, not earning a single penny in the process. I understand that the Northern Ireland Government—I hope that the cabinet secretary is listening carefully to this—is looking at a scheme to fund that sector and I hope that the Scottish Government follows suit. We will be supporting the

Labour motion and I hope that the Government goes that extra mile to make sure that the sector is supported.

16:56

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): The Scottish Government has used Scotland's hospitality sector as a scapegoat in this pandemic. Despite what the cabinet secretary said, the Government has failed to recognise the scale of the contribution that our third biggest employer makes to Scotland's economy, providing over a quarter of a million jobs and adding £6.5 billion to our economy. Hospitality was the first sector pushed into lockdown and it will be the last to have the grip of that lockdown loosened. It has suffered a disproportionate level of job losses due to inadequate Government support and the imposition of continually changing restrictions that are rarely backed up by evidence from the Government and are often contradictory.

I will give one example of that inconsistency. On 23 October, the Government published its so-called Covid strategic framework. A few days later, it provided more detail on what that meant for hospitality at each level. For level 2, for example, it said that all pubs could remain open to serve soft drinks or alcohol with a main meal inside and that, outside, pubs could serve soft drinks or alcohol with or without a meal. We debated that framework and the First Minister answered questions on the imposition of the levels, yet the next day, the Government published regulations that closed all non-food pubs at level 2 upwards from last Monday, utterly contradicting the very framework that we had debated. No hint was given in those debates by the Government that it was even considering doing that.

I get why the Government took that decision—at the time, it looked as though legal closure was the only way to allow those pubs to claim support from the UK Government's planned new closed job support scheme. However, on Saturday 31 October, that scheme was withdrawn and the existing job retention scheme was extended for a month; it has since been extended until March 2021 and, like all my Labour colleagues, I want that extension to continue beyond that period.

That extension to March means that the Government's regulations to close wet pubs are no longer needed. Those pubs can access the furlough scheme, whether they are closed or open. I will happily give way and take an intervention from any Scottish National Party member who wants to get to their feet and tell the pubs in my region, many of which invested significantly in outside areas to meet previous Government restrictions, why the Government has not scrapped the regulations closing the pubs,

which we know are no longer necessary and are completely unfair. Not a single SNP member has taken up that offer—[*Interruption.*—] I will take John Mason's intervention.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Would the member accept that there has been a problem in pubs and in other places serving alcohol simply because people are getting together? We cannot have as many people getting together as we used to. Does he accept that point?

Colin Smyth: Mr Mason is in effect saying that the Government's framework that said that those pubs could remain open was wrong. If that was the Government's position, it should have said so in the first place instead of being dishonest in saying what the position was before passing regulations that closed pubs. How dare the cabinet secretary say that he is concerned about pub closures when it is his regulations that are closing pubs, contradicting what the Government said in the chamber just the day before? No wonder the sector has been forced into the unprecedented step of taking the Government to court as it fights to save the sector.

Today in Parliament, we have an opportunity to unite to support our hospitality and tourism industry. We can show that we are on the side of the sector in saving jobs and that we are on the side of the workers in protecting and improving their terms and conditions. No reasonable person could object to the terms of Labour's motion, so it is disappointing that the Government is not prepared to show that support or that solidarity.

Let us be clear what voting for the SNP amendment means: it means voting to remove from Labour's motion a clear commitment to additional support for the sector and voting against using that Government support to protect and strengthen the terms and conditions of workers. I have to say that the cabinet secretary does not need to lodge an amendment in Parliament to ask himself to meet the trade unions; he just needs to start doing his job properly.

No one disputes that our number 1 aim must be to control the virus. Covid-19 is first and foremost a health crisis that continues to take a terrible toll on our fellow citizens but, too often, when people raise perfectly legitimate questions, offer alternatives, ask to see the evidence for actions, point out inconsistencies—as I have done today—and highlight the economic crisis of Covid, they are unfairly dismissed, brushed aside and accused by the Government of being careless about public health.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please conclude.

Colin Smyth: That is what is happening to our hospitality sector, when it needs support and a recognition of the work that it does to support our economy.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you. I gave you the extra time.

17:01

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): I welcome the debate. I know that hospitality has been one of the hardest-hit sectors in the economy. Like every other member in the chamber, I have spoken to many organisations in my constituency, particularly those in the hospitality trade, that have expressed their frustration and anger about what has happened so far, as well as their welcome for that and their aspirations for the future. However, I will come back to constituents' points in a moment.

It is clear that the impact of the coronavirus in Scotland has been profound. Sadly, my constituency has had the highest level of deaths per head in the country. The coronavirus is the biggest challenge that society has faced in our lifetimes, and the measures that we take to deal with it must reflect the magnitude of what we face. The steps that have been taken in Scotland to contain the virus are unprecedented, and they have changed life as we know it.

Although the current lockdown measures are essential right now, they have damaging consequences for our economy, living standards and physical and mental health. I welcomed the chancellor's introduction of the furlough scheme in March, and I welcomed his recent decision to extend the scheme to March 2021. However, I believe that the delay in announcing the extension until the 11th hour will have cost jobs, as some employers had already taken the difficult decision to make people redundant because they expected the scheme to be withdrawn.

I welcome the chancellor's indication that, as was the case in March, employers will be able to bring back people whom they have made redundant and include them in the furlough scheme, which might go some way towards addressing some of the job losses.

Dr Liz Cameron, the chief executive of Scottish Chambers of Commerce, made interesting comments on that point last week. She said:

"This announcement gives Scottish businesses a glimmer of hope that we may be able to survive and work through this crisis. What we cannot do is to continue with uncertainty which is impacting business confidence, employee motivation and our ability to plan and invest."

She went on:

"However, the furlough scheme alone will not be enough to save businesses so the Chancellor must continue and expand his commitment to providing businesses with guaranteed grants support to help businesses recover."

[Interruption.] I am sorry, but I will not take an intervention, as I have only four minutes.

I welcome the extension of the UK Government's self-employment income support scheme and the confirmation that the level of grant will be 80 per cent of average trading profits for the period from November to January.

As I said, I want to highlight some constituents' issues. I agree with Dr Cameron's comments, and those views are shared by local hospitality businesses. Businesses still have fixed costs to cover, such as electricity, gas and insurance costs, among many others. If they cannot trade, all the funding mechanisms that have been provided thus far, including furlough, the wide number of Scottish Government grants, which include the hardship grant and the grant that is outlined in the strategic framework that has been available from 2 November for businesses that are required to close—it is worth between £2,000 and £3,000, depending on rateable value—the small business bonus, the additional 100 per cent relief from non-domestic rates for properties in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors, and the £10,000 and £25,000 grants, will have been provided in vain. If businesses do not have consistency in the future as regards UK Government policy, all the moneys that have been invested thus far to help them—especially those in the hospitality sector—will have been for nothing.

I agree with the strategic framework, and I believe that it is the right mechanism for the present situation, as I said last week. I can see that the Presiding Officer is telling me to wind up. Businesses need that stability. I welcome the debate. I also welcome the fact that the Governments have been working together, but if the UK Government does not want to do more, it should give this Parliament the funds and the powers to do so.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: It is funny how winding up stretches to half a minute. "Wind up" means wind up on the spot.

I call Murdo Fraser. I know that he will do that.

17:06

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I will do what I am told.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We shall see.

Murdo Fraser: I thank the Labour Party for bringing forward this debate on support for Scotland's tourism and hospitality sector, the importance of which cannot be overstated. The

sector is particularly important in rural parts of the country, including areas such as Perth and Kinross and Fife, which I represent. Tourism is the largest employer in Scotland overall, but the impact is much greater in rural communities.

The sector has had a rollercoaster ride over the past year. The initial restrictions in the spring caused a crisis in the sector, which was followed by hope in the summer, when restrictions were eased and many people took holidays at home rather than travelling abroad. There was a boom in tourism in many parts of the country, which was boosted by schemes such as Rishi Sunak's eat out to help out scheme. Now, however, new restrictions are being introduced, and, in the past few weeks, I have heard too many deeply depressing stories of bookings being cancelled as a result of the introduction of new travel restrictions, and of individuals who have spent their lives building up a business who now fear for the future. Just yesterday, it was announced that Perth and Kinross and Fife will move from tier 2 to tier 3, which will involve the placing of new restrictions on travel and hospitality, thereby making an already serious situation even more difficult.

This is where the Scottish Government needs to step in. It needs to use the substantial resources that have been put at its disposal to provide more direct support for hospitality. I make it clear to the Scottish Government and to Scottish National Party back benchers that, at the start of last month, the additional funding from the UK Government to the Scottish Government was a guaranteed £6.5 billion. Since then, just over the past few weeks, that figure has gone up and an additional £1.7 billion of funding has been provided. According to what the Cabinet Secretary for Finance told the chamber just a few hours ago, that money has not been allocated. That means that hundreds of millions of pounds of money that is available to help the sector is sitting unallocated in the Scottish Government's bank account. The Government needs to stop sitting on that money and start paying out to those in need, otherwise a health crisis will become a jobs catastrophe.

I want to highlight two specific sectors that need assistance. The first is the pubs sector, which Colin Smyth referred to. There are many pubs in the area that I represent that do not have outside space and do not serve food. Therefore, in effect, they had to close a few weeks ago, when restrictions were brought in. Despite that, they were able to access only precisely one half of the grant support that was available to those in the central belt—they could access £2,155, compared with the £4,310 that was available for pubs in Glasgow and Edinburgh. The Scottish Government needs to address that issue and ensure that there is a level playing field.

The second sector that has been hard hit and has received very little support is the one that involves businesses in the wedding industry. Wedding venues have seen virtually their entire business for the year disappear. I have heard of weddings that were booked for the spring of this year, cancelled and rebooked for the autumn, then cancelled and rebooked again for spring 2021, and brides are now being contacted by venues and told that those dates cannot be guaranteed. It is a disaster for wedding venues, which are having to survive on zero income, with no certainty for the future and no ability to take forward bookings or deposits.

The cancellation of weddings has a wider, knock-on impact on all sorts of other businesses, such as taxi businesses, wedding dress suppliers, florists and those who are involved in marquee and catering hire. Gordon's Cater Hire in Blairgowrie wrote to me this week raising concerns about the lack of a clear route out of the restrictions and the fact that the sector has not had specific support when it has been made available to others. Already, one company in the sector has been forced into liquidation this week, and there is a fear that others will follow unless more can be done to assist.

The Scottish Government has more money at its disposal and it needs to start using that money to support businesses that are on the brink of collapse. It needs to step up and start delivering.

17:10

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):

As everyone has recognised, the experience of lockdown and the pandemic restrictions have been particularly difficult for hospitality and tourism businesses. It has been a difficult year, although many got support packages that enabled them to survive through to July, when a short season started and gave the opportunity to create some income. Most businesses then spent hundreds of pounds on screens, sanitisers and signage and employed additional staff while reducing their capacity.

Tourism businesses, from self-catering to visitor attractions, invested to change the way that they operate and reduce the risk to visitors. Very little evidence has been provided that hospitality or tourism have been responsible for an increase in cases, and where that was seen to be the case in Aberdeen, there is a strong argument that it was due to the behaviour of individuals rather than the establishment. There is an argument that any irresponsible traders should be closed rather than the whole sector, the vast majority of which has provided safe environments for people, with businesses incurring expense at a very difficult time.

I will mention briefly the role of historical and cultural tourism. There has been a significant overall package for culture, but with few signs of reopening and with tiers introducing further restrictions for cultural tourism, the viability of our museums sector, which is the second-biggest driver for tourism visitors to Scotland, is at risk. The support packages have been welcomed, but they have been oversubscribed. The cultural sector needs to see a share of the additional business support that is coming to Scotland, in recognition of the pressures that the sector will face in the coming months.

Since 9 October, when the circuit breaker was announced, and with the subsequent introduction of the tier framework, the sector has faced a very difficult time. The delay in announcing the coronavirus restrictions fund and the extremely short timescale for businesses to close did not fully acknowledge the impact on the sector.

When the Welsh Government introduced a firebreak, it announced £300 million of business support, with £5,000 supports for hospitality businesses with rateable values below £51,000. I accept that it can be difficult to compare different approaches, but the support for equivalent businesses in Scotland was £2,875, and it is now either £2,000 or £3,000. That is still £2,000 less than the equivalent support that is being offered in Wales.

Hospitality businesses in tier 2 are not forced to close by law, but the measures that are in place so suppress them that they are in effect unable to operate. For those that do not have to close, the business restrictions grant is discretionary, and it is a lower level of support. There are businesses that are excluded from any support, and I call on the Scottish Government to provide local authorities with flexibility to provide support where it is needed.

This week, I received representations from a catering hire business that has received no support and is not being classed as a hospitality business, and from a recording studio and rehearsal rooms that is not able to access the business restrictions support even though it is virtually closed due to the household number restrictions. It is now clear that wholesale businesses, which qualified for the coronavirus restrictions hardship fund, are excluded from the new fund.

For those businesses that receive support, the levels risk being inadequate to compensate for closure or reduced business, and they risk permanent closures and job losses.

I know that the cabinet secretary regularly meets representatives of the hospitality and tourism sector, but they are too often reporting a

lack of understanding of the impact of decisions. Some decisions appear to be arbitrary, such as the on-going ban on background music, and some show a lack of understanding of how the sector is structured. For example, the cap on the number of bars that can receive support diminishes the support that larger operators receive, although those operators are often the large employers. The restricted sale of alcohol presents significant difficulties for the profitability of hospitality, and some people argue that it is self-defeating and has led to an increase in house parties.

I visited a food bank in Fife last week, which reported an increase in referrals as people in the hospitality sector are made redundant. The extended furlough scheme came too late.

Hospitality jobs are often insecure, and workers are too easily regarded as dispensable. I support Unite the union's tourism and hospitality rescue plan and I welcome members' comments on it. The hospitality and tourism sector, which gives so much to Scotland, is facing a crisis, which requires a greater Government response.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): We do not have much time, members; four-minute speeches, please.

17:15

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this debate.

I agree with a number of things in Labour's motion. Labour is right to describe the balance that we all face if we want to protect people from Covid but not damage the economy. It seems to be like steering a ship in a storm through rocks: if we go too far one way, we hit the rocks of increased infections, swamped hospitals and potentially more deaths; if we go too far the other way, jobs and entire businesses could be lost.

I also agree that we should work with the trade unions, with the primary aim of protecting jobs. Terms and conditions should be maintained, too, although I fear that some reduction in hours is almost inevitable in some organisations. We should not lose sight of the need to improve terms and conditions, especially for the poorest paid and the people with the worst terms and conditions.

It is worth remembering that although some businesses, especially in tourism and hospitality, have been seriously affected by the pandemic, others have done relatively well and should not be using Covid as an excuse to push down their staff costs. Online suppliers, for example, are seeing an upturn in profit and have a chance to treat their workers better than before.

I have problems with some parts of the Labour motion. The suggestion that

“no hospitality or tourism business faces closure”

is unrealistic, sadly. We absolutely should seek to minimise closures, but I fear that some businesses will not survive the pandemic. The suggestion that there should be no job losses is also—sadly—unrealistic. Some jobs have already gone. However, I agree that we should seek to minimise job losses.

The next problem that I have with the motion is the call for

“the Scottish Government to provide additional support”.

I do not believe that the Scottish Government is sitting on a pot of available, uncommitted money. *[Interruption.]* No one is asking to intervene, although Conservative members are shouting.

Murdo Fraser: Will the member give way?

John Mason: I will be happy to give way to Murdo Fraser.

Murdo Fraser: I am grateful to Mr Mason. It is clear that he was not in the chamber during finance questions earlier this afternoon, or he would have heard my question about that money to the finance secretary, Kate Forbes. She confirmed that the money is unallocated in the Scottish budget. It is sitting there, waiting to be spent.

John Mason: Murdo Fraser plays with words, to some extent. *[Interruption.]* I accept that some of the money has not yet been spent, but someone has to pay for ScotRail over the next three or four months, someone has to compensate for the lack of tax coming in, someone has to look at whether local government needs more money—*[Interruption.]* I will not take a second intervention. The Conservatives are being disingenuous when they suggest that there is extra money sitting around.

Of course, the UK Government does not have extra money sitting around, either. It just borrows more and more and more. We can continue with increased borrowing in the short term, but in the long term we cannot continue borrowing at this level.

Apart from anything else, it is totally unfair to expect our children and grandchildren to pick up the pieces in future, when we are not contributing what we can afford today. Some individuals and some organisations have done fine during the pandemic and restrictions so far. Many of us have not seen a fall in our wages and salaries. Many of us have saved money because we could not go out for meals. Many people have saved money because they have not been commuting or paying for childcare, holidays and so on. There is room at

least to consider raising taxes, as the Scottish Human Rights Commission suggested at the Finance and Constitution Committee today.

We need to look after as many workers and people in the hospitality sector as we can, but we also need to be hard headed and realistic—not something that Labour does well—and consider, not least, where the resources will come from to build the fairer society that we all want.

17:19

Michelle Ballantyne (South Scotland) (Con): I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests.

Last week, the South of Scotland Destination Alliance conducted a flash survey of the sector on the impact of the new tier system and the lockdown in England. The results are stark: 90 to 100 per cent of bookings are cancelled, and there is an estimated loss of over £1 million. Some £500,000 of that is directly due to our new Scottish tiers.

From hotels and restaurants to bingo halls and visitor attractions, time and money have been invested in making them Covid safe. That has meant reducing footfall and adjusting to new systems. However, redundancies are mounting up as businesses in the sector close their doors permanently or reduce their staff in an effort to survive.

Confusion is setting in. The new system of funding for businesses has yet to be announced, and that leaves no clear understanding of what support is now available, despite the UK Government's making available an extra £1.7 billion to the Scottish Government.

Three weeks ago, the manager of Cringletie hotel, which is near Peebles, and other prominent hoteliers signed a letter to Nicola Sturgeon that called for changes to restrictions to protect jobs. The requests in that letter were ignored. As a result, Cringletie hotel has been forced to close its doors until at least Christmas. As the manager stated,

“there is not much point in staying open if we can't welcome any guests.”

The Bay Waverley Castle hotel, which is a coach tour hotel that brings thousands of tourists from across Europe to Melrose every year, shut for good in the summer. For decades, visitors to that hotel have boosted the local Borders economy. Staff have lost their jobs; some have even lost their homes.

The Crieff Hydro group, which owns the Peebles Hydro, was faced with no other option than to let more than a quarter of its workforce go. That was some several hundred jobs in total.

Those closures and many others mean that laundries, food suppliers and ground maintenance businesses are also impacted. Companies such as Belhaven Trout Company have been refused support, but they form a key part of the tourism supply chain. For every hospitality and tourist venue that closes its doors, a supply chain of jobs is hit. Such businesses are essential for the hospitality and tourism sector's recovery in Scotland, and we cannot afford to drive them out of business.

To put things in context, in 2018, there were 421,000 domestic and international overnight visits just to the Borders. That was a significant growth on the previous year, and it resulted in revenue of around £80 million. Eating out was the second most popular activity for those on domestic day trips. That was probably because the most popular activity was taking a long walk.

Let us be clear: the furlough scheme has been essential to survival during lockdown, but surely members can understand that the fixed costs of any business still accrue even when revenue disappears. Furlough alone is not a panacea.

The summer season has come and gone, Christmas is all but cancelled, and few businesses have any reserves left. If we are serious about protecting the hospitality and tourism sector, we need to let it operate. We need clear guidance that is not contradictory, and we need to allow residents to eat out locally in Covid-safe restaurants and enjoy a glass of wine. We need supply chains to be protected and supported when they have nobody to deliver to, and we need a proper testing system in our airports so that Scottish hotels and venues can welcome back overseas visitors—particularly those from Europe, who are our biggest customers. Above all, we need a Scottish Government that listens and engages with the sector.

The sector needs action, and it is not the UK Government that it is waiting for. Our colleagues at Westminster have made good on their promises of furlough and support. Now it is time for the SNP to step up as well.

The Presiding Officer: I call Shona Robison, before we move to the closing speeches. Ms Robison, I think that you might need to flip your camera to the other direction.

17:24

Shona Robison (Dundee City East) (SNP): My apologies, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer: We are getting a nice picture of the vase on your table.

Shona Robison: Apologies. I have done that so many times.

First, I thank all the businesses across Dundee for the incredible effort that they have made and are still making to suppress Covid in what are unquestionably very trying times. I hope that, through their effort and that of everyone in Dundee, we will see infection rates falling and will be able to lessen restrictions in the near future—something that is vital for our local businesses.

Help and advice are also vital for businesses at this time, and local authorities have, from what I have seen, been doing a very effective job to ensure that businesses can access the latest help and advice. Dundee City Council has a Covid-19 business support summary, which is updated when new funding or help becomes available. Clear communication such as that is essential to help businesses to plan clearly and to access the support that they need. Although the announcement that the UK Government's retention scheme has been extended to the end of March is very welcome, the way in which it was communicated was not good, and many local businesses have told me that they found it difficult to get information. We need that to improve. Similarly, the UK Government's business interruption loan scheme was also extended to the end of January next year, which again was welcome, but the communication could have been better.

As it set out in its strategic framework in response to the most recent restrictions, the Scottish Government has provided additional grants for businesses that were forced to close and hardship grants for those that remain open but are impacted by restrictions, which will cover every four weeks of restrictions. The motion also mentions the issue of eligibility and access for businesses to the Covid-19 restrictions fund on hardship grounds. Like many members, I have received a fair few inquiries from business owners in my constituency who are looking for guidance and clarity on the support that is available.

Last week, I asked the cabinet secretary what discussions the Scottish Government had had with local authorities and banks about the eligibility criteria for the Covid-19 restrictions fund, particularly in relation to the criterion that requires those who apply to have a business bank account to pay funds into if the application is successful. We know that, because of some of the delays, banks were not able to open accounts for those who did not have them. I was encouraged by the fact that the cabinet secretary acknowledged that the Government was aware of the issue and that it is working to address those concerns. Is the cabinet secretary able to give any update on the issue that would be helpful to those in my constituency who are affected?

Presiding Officer, I am very conscious of the time, so I will leave it there. I am in touch with local businesses in my constituency and know the difficulties that they are experiencing. We should come together to support them in any way that we can. I am pleased to support the Scottish Government's amendment.

The Presiding Officer: I thank Ms Robison for bringing her remarks to a close early. We move to the closing speeches.

17:28

Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con): We have heard today of the degree to which the hospitality and tourism sectors and their supply chains have been deeply impacted by the pandemic, as well as individual stories of businesses brought to their knees throughout the crisis. Interventions such as the UK Government's furlough scheme and its extension until the end of March, combined with sector-specific action such as the reduction in VAT, have clearly provided a lifeline. However, despite the size of the interventions to date, the hospitality and tourism sectors are at breaking point, and, as we move into the winter and more and more areas of Scotland move into tighter restrictions, there is no end in sight.

The first issue that we heard about today, which was highlighted by Richard Leonard, is that the SNP is not listening to businesses; therefore, there is a disconnect between the SNP Government's interventions and the needs of the hospitality and tourism sectors. That is why we have repeatedly called for businesses to be at the heart of the decision-making process—*[Interruption.]* I have to make progress, as I have only four minutes. That is why we continue to propose a coronavirus job advisory council to ensure that businesses are fully consulted. That point is reflected in Oliver Mundell's amendment.

The second issue, which was outlined by Murdo Fraser, is that the SNP Government has failed to act with urgency to support the hospitality and tourism sectors throughout the crisis. Too often, its interventions have taken too long to get to businesses in need, and, too often, the Government has had to change the criteria for support due to a backlash from business. That lack of urgency is symptomatic of its lack of engagement with businesses.

The third issue, which was mentioned by Oliver Mundell, Willie Rennie and Michelle Ballantyne, is that the Scottish Government must do more for the hospitality and tourism sectors and their supply chains. The recent £40 million package of support for the hospitality sector was welcome, but the sector has decried it as being not nearly enough.

Some businesses have received no support at all. For example, travel agents, who have worked continually since March to help their customers to obtain refunds—often out of their own pockets—are receiving no support.

The food and drink wholesale sector, which services 5,000 convenience stores and 38,000 hospitality and tourism businesses as well as care homes and the public sector, is another example. Its turnover is at a meagre 30 per cent, stock is being discarded and redundancies have kicked in. Last week, the First Minister, in her response to my colleague Brian Whittle, assured wholesalers that they would get the financial support that they need, but it seems that they have been left out of the newly launched strategic framework business fund. I hope that the cabinet secretary will address that point in his closing speech, as those businesses desperately need a specific support package in order to save jobs.

The SNP Government is carrying a £500 million underspend from its recent autumn budget revision, which is in addition to the £1.7 billion injection from the UK Government that it has received in the past six weeks. The SNP has at its disposal the means to provide additional, sector-specific support to the tourism and hospitality sectors and their supply chains. That is why we will support Labour's motion.

I urge the SNP to constructively take on board the points that have been raised today and to act faster, go further and listen closely to those business that are being deeply impacted by this crisis.

17:32

The Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills (Jamie Hepburn): In the limited time available, I will not be able to cover every point that has been raised over the course of the debate. However, let me say at the outset—because there seems to be a suggestion that the Government does not recognise this fact—that we recognise the importance of the tourism and hospitality sector to this country. Not only is it an important economic anchor in many parts of the country; it is an important part of the fabric and of the story of Scotland.

We also recognise that the current situation is hugely challenging for businesses across the board but for tourism and hospitality in particular. We have sought to respond to that, and I reject the suggestion that we have not. Right from the outset of the pandemic, we have sought to work hand in hand with tourism and hospitality through—

Oliver Mundell: Will the minister give way?

Jamie Hepburn: No. Ordinarily I would, but I will not be taking any interventions because of the limited time that I have.

We have sought to work with the sector through the Scottish tourism emergency response group and the tourism recovery task force, whose membership is drawn from across the sector. I do not think that Patrick Harvie characterised the membership of that group fairly. Of course it contains representatives of employers, but it also contains representatives of the workforce through Prospect and Unite. It contains representation from local government and from public sector agencies as well. They all come together with the singular focus of ensuring that we sustain tourism and hospitality in Scotland.

Having mentioned Unite, I will mention in passing the Unite hospitality and tourism rescue plan. It was interesting that Richard Leonard mentioned the plan, but we see when we turn our attention to the motion that he laid before Parliament that it is not mentioned there. The amendment that we laid before Parliament does mention the plan and calls on the Government to meet the UK Government to discuss it.—*[Interruption.]*

I hear Mr Smyth saying that we do not need to call on ourselves to meet the unions. That is quite correct, but I do not need to be told that, as I meet the Scottish Trades Union Congress and its affiliates every week, and unions have been integral to informing the sectoral guidance that we have pulled together. However, today there is a chance for this Parliament to say to the UK Government that it should come to the table, too, and I regret that Parliament looks set to turn its face against doing precisely that.

I also want to talk about the tourism recovery task force, which published its recommendations in a report on 23 October. It is very much designed to ensure that we mitigate the impact of the virus and protect jobs but also ensure the long-term position of tourism and hospitality. I want to draw Parliament's attention to one recommendation in the report, which is, again, reflected in our amendment. The report calls for an extension of the jobs retention scheme. I recognise and agree with the point that that alone will not sustain any sector but, of course, it has been a vital part of sustaining employment and, again, it is mentioned in the Unite recovery plan, too.

Today, Parliament has a chance to restate its position that the furlough scheme should be extended to save the 61,000 jobs that could be saved in the first half of next year if it is extended until the end of June. Again, I regret the fact that Parliament seems to be setting its face against doing that.

Lastly, I will focus on the Tory amendment. Frankly, it is unclear what is being sought. If the suggestion is that we are not engaging with businesses, I assure the Conservatives that that is not the case. Since the end of the summer recess alone, ministers have met business organisations more than 160 times. That does not include individual businesses that we meet on a daily basis—if any member wants the details of those meetings, we will be happy to provide them. Frankly, the idea that we are not engaging with business does not hold up, either.

This has been a short debate, but it has given us a chance to reflect the challenges before the sector and to reflect on what we have done, while recognising that there is more to be done. I assure the chamber that we will get on with the task at hand and will continue to support tourism and hospitality in Scotland not only to survive this current pandemic but to thrive and survive long into the future.

17:37

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): The hospitality and tourism industry is on its knees. As Richard Leonard said, we have had lockdown and travel restrictions, then eat out to help out, localised restrictions, confusion over what was a cafe, announcements made with little notice, and now we have a five-tier framework.

I will start by thanking the cabinet secretary, although it will probably embarrass him. I am grateful to him for his regular engagement with hospitality businesses in my area, but I am just not sure that his understanding of the challenges are shared by his colleagues. For the record, we would have supported the Green amendment and, indeed, the SNP amendment, had they not removed the need for a review of the grants programme that the Scottish Government runs.

We are in favour of extending furlough and we are 100 per cent supportive of the Unite hospitality and tourism rescue plan. However, we want to get beyond warm words and simply blaming somebody else and saying that it is their problem. We need to do something here and now.

The cabinet secretary knows that there are problems with the existing grants. I will give the chamber some examples. The hotel support scheme of £14 million was welcome, but only 30 per cent of applicants got an award. It was vastly oversubscribed, and that unmet need remains. Hoteliers tell me that they are effectively closed but, because they have not been forced to close, they do not qualify for some grants. The coronavirus restriction funds and the hardship fund that has now been replaced by the strategic framework business fund are far too narrow in

their criteria. Businesses without bank accounts are automatically rejected; bed-and-breakfast establishments in Scotland are not allowed any assistance from those grants, but those in England are allowed to access grants; supply chain companies are denied assistance unless they provide perishable goods, and it appears that wholesalers are left out of the new framework fund; and suppliers of cleaning and other catering products are denied any assistance, even though they provide important services and jobs in an industry that is all but closed. Restaurateurs say that the issue is not just about chefs and waiting staff. They are desperately worried that the current situation will destroy suppliers that help make Scotland a land of food and drink.

Restaurateurs also ask me for the evidence that supports the difference in restrictions. Why 6 pm closing in tier 3, but 8 pm in tier 2? Why no alcohol with food, when that is an important part of a restaurant's viability? Further, if there is to be no alcohol, why can restaurants not stay open later?

Opening from 6 am is of relatively little use; having last orders at 4.30 pm means that it is essentially just a lunch time trade. Where is the evidence of transmission in restaurants? Will the Government publish it to help their understanding? Hospitality settings are safe places. They address all the requirements to ensure the safety and confidence of their customers and staff.

Businesses in Loch Lomond and the Trossachs national park tell me that their normal markets have disappeared due to the travel restrictions. Short breaks have evaporated. They are effectively in lockdown. They tell me that the extension of furlough was welcome, but for some it came just too late; they had already started the painful exercise of making long-serving staff redundant. I hope that the retrospective arrangements mean that some staff can be re-employed and furloughed. In the meantime, they face a long hard winter with substantial overheads and no income streams. They will struggle to survive without additional financial support over the next five months. Some have already closed their doors for good with the loss of thousands of jobs.

To give hospitality and tourism a chance, the Scottish Government must use the additional resources that it has from the UK Government—some £1 billion that is not yet allocated—to provide hospitality and tourism businesses with urgent financial assistance. It should start by having an urgent review of all financial support for the sector, it should expand the hotel support scheme, which was inadequate and oversubscribed, and it should extend the criteria in the new strategic framework business fund so that hotels, B and Bs, restaurants, supply chain

companies, charitable enterprises and those without business bank accounts can benefit.

The cabinet secretary is smiling. He knows that he needs to do all that, to ensure that any scheme is open to businesses of different sizes as part of a tourism and hospitality strategy and to support the Unite hospitality and tourism rescue plan. He should get hospitality and tourism businesses around the table. He will get better solutions if he listens to them and understands the challenges that they face. That is what they want to happen.

We all want to defeat the virus, but we also need to sustain our economy. Hospitality and tourism businesses are on the brink of collapse with the loss of thousands of jobs. They need our support right now. The Scottish Government has the money to provide that. It needs to get on with the job before it is far too late.

Urgent Question

Test and Protect (Contact Tracing Performance)

17:42

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is an urgent question from Jackie Baillie, on the performance of test and protect.

Before I call Ms Baillie, I would like to highlight that my preference would have been for this urgent question to have been scheduled before the Labour Party debate on testing for all health and social care workers, given the clear crossover between the two issues. That possibility was explored with the Scottish Government; my understanding was that an earlier time slot was not possible due to the cabinet secretary's diary commitments and the need for time to prepare for the debate and urgent question, both of which are entirely understandable reasons.

I was, however, surprised to see the cabinet secretary giving an interview to journalists in the garden lobby at around the time that had been put to the Government. I believe that the interview was not primarily about the subject matter of the question, although the issue was raised in questions and answers. I restate my strong expectation that ministers making themselves available to answer parliamentary questions in the chamber should take precedence over media interviews or briefings.

We turn now to the urgent question.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government when it was informed that errors had been made in the publicly reported contact tracing performance of test and protect.

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): If I may, before I answer the question, I say that I hear what the Presiding Officer said and, of course, had it been within my control, I would not have been with the interviewer who asked me a question that was not what was scheduled to be discussed, which was the vaccination programme. However, unfortunately, I do not control what questions the media ask me.

With regard to the urgent question, I presume that members—[*Interruption.*] I presume that members wish to hear the urgent answer.

Public Health Scotland alerted the Scottish Government to an error in the contact tracing time statistics shortly before midday on 4 November, which was last Friday—last Thursday, rather—stating that a coding error had been discovered. Public Health Scotland added an alert to its 4

November publication and web pages, which stated that an error had been discovered and that a revised set of tables would be released at midday on 6 November. Public Health Scotland subsequently informed the Office for Statistics Regulation, and the revised figures were published at midday on Friday 6 November.

Jackie Baillie: The errors in the contact tracing data that *The Sun* newspaper revealed are truly staggering and undermine public confidence in the system. Contact tracing is performing five times worse than the Scottish Government reported. Of those who tested positive, less than half were contacted within 24 hours. In one week in September alone, a minuscule 3.9 per cent of positive cases were contacted. That means that, over that period, some 15,000 people who tested positive were not contacted within 24 hours. Now, we are not even phoning people—we are simply sending them text messages.

In May, the scientific advisory group for emergencies said that delays in contact tracing would have an impact on the R number. Does the cabinet secretary therefore believe that the error resulted in an increased spread of Covid in September and October?

Jeane Freeman: No, I do not.

In fact, what undermines public confidence is misrepresentation, wherever it comes from—whether from members on other parties' benches or elsewhere.

I make it clear that I am really disappointed that Ms Baillie prefers to accept what Baroness Dido Harding says about how we do our job to accepting the facts. I am afraid that the good baroness is wrong. We do not just send SMS messages: we phone contacts of index cases up to three times until we find them. For those whom we then trace as contacts, we use a mixture of phone calls and SMS, moving incrementally to using phone calls entirely.

Acknowledging that the information in question was miscoded and wrong is not to deny the fact that in the week up to 8 November, we far exceeded the World Health Organization's requirement that

"At least 80% of new cases have their close contacts traced and in quarantine within 72 hours of case confirmation",

with 95.8 per cent of contact tracing of all positive cases being completed within 72 hours.

I repeat what I said earlier: it is entirely wrong, and unfair to the staff who are working so hard in our test and protect system—[*Interruption.*]

I remind members that it is not me who is doing test and protect, but those staff. They are working hard, are working long hours and are doing

exceptionally well, and they are helping us to suppress the virus.

Members might not like that answer, and it is clear from what I am hearing that members on the Opposition sides of the chamber do not, but the facts are the facts, and I tell those members that they are wrong.

Jackie Baillie: With all due respect to the cabinet secretary, I tell her that I have never knowingly quoted the baroness; rather, constituents have contacted me to tell me that they have been advised by text message.

I advise the cabinet secretary that one cherry-picked statistic does not restore confidence in the system. The First Minister has told members in the chamber many times that everything is fine and that contact tracing is working well, but the truth is different. Contact tracers work extremely hard and deserve our thanks, but there are not enough of them, and that is the Scottish Government's responsibility.

Seven months ago, we were promised 2,000 contact tracers, and we got 800 seconded posts. Ministers boasted about getting 20,000 applications, but those applicants have been contacted only in the past few weeks. Given the rising number of positive Covid cases, what assessment has been made of demand? We now have 2,000 contract tracers—it has only taken seven months. Will that be enough to enable the system to cope?

We expect the public to take responsibility and follow the rules. Does the Government also not have a responsibility to get contact tracing right in order to stop the spread of the virus?

Jeane Freeman: Yes, we absolutely do have that responsibility, which is why I am glad that we are meeting it and are getting contact tracing right. If we look at the revised Public Health Scotland figures—which were revised after it had spotted its coding error—for the period from 9 August to 25 October, regarding the time that was taken between the case appearing in the test and protect system and the interview being completed by the contact tracer, we find that that was done within 72 hours in 95 per cent of cases.

I do not believe that the system is failing. We have 2,221 fully trained contact tracers. We said at the outset of test and protect that we would have 2,000 fully trained contact tracers. We had them, and we now have another 221. We flex the system against demand on the system. That makes perfect sense, and that is what we have been doing.

We have sufficient contact tracers to meet the demands of the current system and the predicted demand as we go forward, but—[*Interruption.*]

This will not work if Ms Baillie just talks at me while I am answering her question. We will continue to advertise, recruit, train and bring on board additional contact tracers, including in a bank system, so that we have that back-up if the number of cases should rise significantly and 2,221 contract tracers is insufficient.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I am so disappointed that the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport is defending the indefensible. For months now, I have been repeatedly rebuked by the First Minister for questioning the effectiveness of the testing and tracing system. I did so because outbreaks were not being brought under control by test and protect.

Now we discover that thousands of close contacts, who had a high chance of being contagious, were out and about when they should have been self-isolating. The health secretary says that she would have done nothing different if she had known that. That is codswallop, and she knows it: we would have had more tracers.

Can the health secretary tell me this: how many more people were infected as a result of that error?

Jeane Freeman: It was a coding error—the issue is about how data are put into the system. The error meant that the numbers that had gone into the system, saying that cases had been contacted within 24 hours, were out. That was revised—members can look at the revised data and see the difference between what was originally published and what was revised when the coding error was corrected.

That is not about people who have been missed. I am not “defending the indefensible”; I am simply pointing out that our test and protect system more than meets the required World Health Organization standard, and that we have more than enough contact tracers, who are fully trained and ready to be deployed, although we continue to recruit more, so that we have a bank of them.

I am not defending the indefensible. I say sorry to members, but I am simply stating the facts. I regret that members do not like it—but, as I said, facts are facts.

Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green): The cabinet secretary will no doubt agree that the public must have confidence in test and protect.

I have two questions. First, for the record, can the cabinet secretary confirm that the coding error that was made was that people were noted as having been contacted between 0 and 24 hours after the index case was notified instead of within 24 to 48 hours? Can she clarify that that is the actual error that was made?

Secondly, can the cabinet secretary say what implications, if any, that error has had for decisions that Scottish ministers have made in their response to the pandemic and the restrictions that they have put in place over the past few weeks?

Jeane Freeman: Mr Wightman is correct: the error in classifying the cases meant that some cases were classified as having been notified within 0 and 24 hours, when they should have been classified as having been notified within between 24 and 48 hours.

Mr Wightman is absolutely correct in his understanding of the coding error, and I can confirm that none of the earlier or revised information, which members are welcome to look at, would have made any difference to the decisions that we have taken in relation to the strategic framework or the allocation of levels of restriction to local authorities across Scotland.

Business Motions

17:55

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-23313, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 17 November 2020

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions

followed by Ministerial Statement: COVID-19

followed by Ministerial Statement: Update on Scotland's Social Security Benefits

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Annual Veterans Update

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 18 November 2020

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
Transport, Infrastructure and
Connectivity;
Justice and Law officers

followed by Scottish Green Party Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.10 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 19 November 2020

12.20 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

12.20 pm First Minister's Questions

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:
Constitution, Europe and External Affairs

followed by Public Petitions Committee Debate:
Improving Youth Football in Scotland

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

4.25 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 24 November 2020

2.00 pm Time for Reflection
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Topical Questions
followed by Ministerial Statement: COVID-19
followed by Health and Sport Committee Debate: Medicines Inquiry
followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Period Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Bill
followed by Committee Announcements
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 6.45 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 25 November 2020

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Economy, Fair Work and Culture; Education and Skills
followed by Scottish Government Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)
 5.10 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Thursday 26 November 2020

12.20 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 12.20 pm First Minister's Questions
 2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.30 pm Portfolio Questions: Health and Sport
followed by Stage 1 Debate: Tied Pubs (Scotland) Bill
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.05 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 16 November 2020, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted.—[*Graeme Dey*]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-23314, also in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on the stage 2 timetable for a bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the United Kingdom Withdrawal from the European Union

(Continuity) (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 be completed by 4 December 2020.—[*Graeme Dey*]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S5M-23321, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument. I ask members who wish to speak against the motion to indicate that now.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Census (Scotland) Amendment Order 2020 [draft] be approved.—[*Graeme Dey*]

17:56

Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con): I rise to speak against the statutory instrument on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives. We do not agree that Scotland's census should be delayed to 2022. Good data has never been more important and putting the census out of sync with the rest of the United Kingdom will make it more difficult for academics in Scotland and elsewhere to carry out vital research and scrutiny. UK-wide population statistics are used to calculate key economic and social indicators, such as unemployment and mortality rates. A delay to the Scotland census would make Scottish population estimates less accurate. This would be the first time since the second world war that the census day has not been synchronised across the UK.

The Scottish National Party's justification for delaying the census is poor. That action has not been deemed necessary in other parts of the UK, so we must question whether it is down to a lack of preparation or ambition from the Government.

National Records of Scotland has presented options on how to preserve the 2021 census date. We urge the Government to think again about those options to avoid another—avoidable—delay to the vital publication. I urge the chamber to reject this legislation and, instead, to ask the SNP to return with proposals to deliver Scotland's census on time.

17:57

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture (Fiona Hyslop): The instrument before the chamber today relates to the census and seeks to move it to 2022, following the significant impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the planning for a 2021 census. Until the pandemic, NRS was on track to deliver a successful census in 2021.

Let me be clear that the decision to move the date of the census was not taken lightly. We are all aware of major events around the world that have been cancelled or significantly disrupted due to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

Planning for Scotland's census has been seriously impacted as a result of the pandemic, as many of those events have been. Indeed, censuses across the world have been impacted. The census in Ireland has been postponed to 2022, and other international censuses—in Australia and Canada, for example—have had to cancel rehearsals or reduce scope.

Many members have heard me say how important census data is. It is crucial that a high response rate be achieved. Scotland's census 2011 achieved a response rate of 94 per cent, so we need to repeat that high level of response for 2022. The other options that we considered in order to preserve the 2021 date estimated a response rate of no more than 80 per cent, which would not deliver the required quality of data. A high response rate produces high-quality outputs that data users can use in the short, medium and long term, and it is for that reason that the decision was made to move the census to 2022.

We must ensure that the census produces the high-quality data that is required by users, and moving the date provides the best chance of the census doing that. No other survey provides the range of information that the census provides. We get only one chance every decade to ask the people of Scotland to complete a census, which makes it all the more important that a full census is taken, and that it reaches all communities across Scotland.

I requested that NRS thoroughly consider all the options to preserve the 2021 census date, but none of the options provided confidence in securing high response rates and achieving a successful census.

Scotland's census methodology was not designed to manage the level of bias and non-response that would be likely with a March 2021 census. The Office for National Statistics has some mitigations around statistical methodology and access to data to manage a biased or low response. That is not available to NRS and did not inform the Scottish census design, which it was on track to deliver pre-pandemic.

I appreciate that some data users will be disappointed about having to wait an additional year for data, and that there may be concerns about Scotland's census being out of sync with the rest of the UK, but I reassure members that NRS will continue to work with the other UK census offices and its users to ensure that Scotland's census delivers the high-quality analysis and outputs that are required. The change of census date provides the best opportunity to do so, and Scotland will still feed into the UK population estimates—the change of date does not prevent that.

NRS officials appeared before the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee, which scrutinised the recommendation to move the census to 2022, and I appeared before the committee, when my decision to move the census was scrutinised. The process was open and transparent, and I am grateful to the committee for unanimously recommending approval of the SSI.

I invite the Parliament to approve the Census (Scotland) Amendment Order 2020.

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

The next item of business is consideration of eight Parliamentary Bureau motions. I invite Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motions S5M-23315 and S5M-23316, on committee meeting times, and motions S5M-23317 to S5M-23320, S5M-23322 and S5M-23323, on approval of SSIs.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that, under Rule 12.3.3B of Standing Orders, the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee can meet, if necessary, at the same time as a meeting of the Parliament from 2pm to 4.30pm on Wednesday 18 November for the purpose of considering and agreeing its report on its inquiry into construction and procurement of ferry vessels in Scotland.

That the Parliament agrees that, under Rule 12.3.3B of Standing Orders, the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee can meet, if necessary, at the same time as a meeting of the Parliament on Tuesday 24 November during debate on the Health and Sport Committee's inquiry into Supply and demand for medicines, and during Members' Business, for the purpose of considering amendments at stage 2 to the United Kingdom Withdrawal from the European Union Continuity (Scotland) Bill.

That the Parliament agrees that the Code of Practice for the Welfare of Laying Hens (Revocation) (Scotland) Notice 2020 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Human Tissue (Excepted Body Parts) (Scotland) Regulations 2020 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Mandatory Use of Closed Circuit Television in Slaughterhouses (Scotland) Regulations 2020 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Welfare of Farmed Animals (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2020 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Public Health Information for Passengers Travelling to Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2020 (SSI 2020/328) be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (International Travel) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 19) Regulations 2020 (SSI 2020/330) be approved.—
[Graeme Dey]

Decision Time

18:02

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The first question is, that amendment S5M-23296.3, in the name of Jeane Freeman, which seeks to amend motion S5M-23296, in the name of Monica Lennon, on routine Covid-19 testing for all health and social care workers, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division. We will have a short suspension to allow all members online and in the chamber to access the voting app.

18:02

Meeting suspended.

18:06

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We move to the division on amendment S5M-23296.3. Members may cast their votes. This will be a one-minute division.

The vote is closed. If any member believes that they have not voted, please let me know through a point of order.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
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)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
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)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 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)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 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)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 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)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 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)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 116, Against 5, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-23296.1, in the name of Donald Cameron, which seeks to amend motion S5M-23296, in the name of Monica Lennon, on routine Covid-19 testing for all health and social care workers, as amended, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-23296, in the name of Monica Lennon, on routine Covid-19 testing for all health and social care workers, as amended, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

That the Parliament notes the ongoing threat to life and health posed by COVID-19 and the warnings of extreme winter pressures on the NHS; recognises the need for the Test and Protect system to be able to provide rapid turnaround contact tracing and cope with increasing demand during the winter months, and calls on the Scottish Government to introduce routine weekly COVID-19 testing for all health and social care workers immediately, with prioritisation of staff groups to be guided by expert clinical advice.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-23299.2, in the name of Fergus Ewing, which seeks to amend motion S5M-23299, in the name of Richard Leonard, on additional support for Scotland's tourism and hospitality sectors during the Covid-19 pandemic, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed. Members should let me know if they have a point of order. I call Gil Paterson.

Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): Hello, Presiding Officer. Can you hear me? I do not see you.

I see you now. [*Inaudible.*—at all, and I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Paterson. I will ensure that your yes vote is noted and that your name is added to the voting roll.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr 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)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (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)
 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)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 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)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind)
 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)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)

Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (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)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

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)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 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)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 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)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 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)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 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)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 60, Against 63, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-23299.1, in the name of Oliver Mundell, which seeks to amend motion S5M-23299, in the name of Richard Leonard, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed. If any members have had difficulty voting, please let me 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)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 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)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 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, Dr 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)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (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)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind)
 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)
 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)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 57, Against 66, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-23299, in the name of Richard Leonard, on additional support for Scotland's tourism and hospitality sectors during the Covid-19 pandemic, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed. I call Keith Brown, who wishes to make a point of order.

I again call Keith Brown to make his point of order, if we can hear him.

We will try to restore the connection to Mr Brown. In the meantime, Shona Robison also wishes to make a point of order.

Shona Robison (Dundee City East) (SNP): [*Inaudible.*—I would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Robison. You would have noted no in the division. Is that right?

Shona Robison: That is correct.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you very much. I will ensure that your vote is added to the roll.

Before I call Clare Adamson to make a point of order, I advise her that her vote has been recorded. I also advise both Claire Haughey and Kate Forbes that their votes have been recorded.

I call Keith Brown to make his point of order. Mr Brown, this is the Presiding Officer speaking. Can you hear me, and do you wish to make a point of order?

I ask Mr Brown to switch his video function off. We will try to connect with him through his audio function only.

I advise Michael Matheson that his vote has been recorded. Once we have heard from Mr Brown, I will call Clare Adamson, who wishes to make a general point of order.

Is Keith Brown able to make his point of order now?

We are clearly having connectivity problems as you can all see. We will try and get Mr Brown back in a second. In the meantime, Clare Adamson wishes to make a point of order.

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): Thank you, Presiding Officer. That took a little bit of time.

The sound quality has been particularly challenging today. We were only just able to hear one of the vote results, and subsequent votes would have depended on that result. You were silent for a while, Presiding Officer, which made it difficult to follow proceedings. A visual representation or recording of what has been passed would be helpful for those of us who are at home in future.

Also, and I have already raised this, there are three Clares in the chamber and if people do not use our second names when they respond to us when we are all in the chat, it becomes confused.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you for those points of order, Ms Adamson.

I call Kate Forbes to make a point of order.

Kate Forbes (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): I echo Clare Adamson's point that the sound has been very poor tonight.

I should have voted no. I understand that the vote has been recorded as yes because I tapped it as I was scrolling down and the screen froze, meaning that I was unable to change my vote. I just wanted to make the point of order that I would have voted no. Reception this evening has been awful.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Forbes. That is noted and it will be on the record, although I cannot change your vote for that reason. It will be noted and it will be on the record.

I call Clare Haughey to make a point of order.

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I had similar problems to Kate Forbes in that I would have voted no, but the screen froze and I was unable to change my vote.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Clare Haughey. That is also noted and will be a matter of record, although I cannot change the vote for that reason.

I call Angela Constance to make a point of order.

Angela Constance (Almond Valley) (SNP): Thank you, Presiding Officer. Like other colleagues, I have had problems with frozen screens and I could not hear your instructions. For the record, my vote should have been no.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Constance. That is noted.

I call Gil Paterson.

Members: Aw naw!

The Presiding Officer: This is important, colleagues.

Gil Paterson: It is more of a point of information, Presiding Officer. I managed to contact Keith Brown to alert him that we could not hear him. I advised him to make contact with the whip, who would get a message to you at your desk and see whether we could resolve the problem. I hope that that is helpful. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Mr Paterson, could you just hold on for one second?

Will members please keep their conversations down so that we can hear Mr Paterson's point of order? Mr Paterson, would you mind repeating that, please?

Gil Paterson: Surely, Presiding Officer. It is more of a point of information. I managed to telephone Keith Brown to say that he could not be heard or seen, and I advised him to contact our whip to get a message to you at your desk. I hope that that is helpful.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Paterson.

I call Joan McAlpine to make a point of order.

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I had similar problems to the ones that other colleagues had. I think that my vote was recorded as a yes. I could not hear the proceedings because BlueJeans was cutting out. I should have voted no, or I intended to do so.

The Presiding Officer: That will be noted for the record as a point of order as well, Ms McAlpine.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I should point out that there was a flurry of activity at the back of the chamber between the Scottish National Party whip and the minister. I think that what has happened is not a technical fault; it is just that they changed their minds, and the vote changed, but they did not bother to tell members who were voting remotely.

The Presiding Officer: Ms Baillie, that is not—[*Interruption.*] Colleagues, we are already well over time. A number of people are definitely having connectivity—[*Interruption.*] Mr Hepburn, I have not even finished explaining my response to one point of order. Will you please sit down?

We are already very late, and there are clearly a number of connectivity issues. There are members

who wish to make points on the record. I am making it clear when the vote can and cannot be changed. Members have the right to ensure that people know how they would have voted, even if the vote cannot be changed.

Before I take any points of order in the chamber, I still wish to check whether any members online wish to make a point of order.

I call Michael Matheson.

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity (Michael Matheson): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I experienced the same problems as others. During the results for Fergus Ewing's amendment, there was no sound from the Presiding Officer to indicate what the results were. As a result, my vote is recorded incorrectly. I would have voted no had I been aware of the outcome of the vote on that amendment.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Matheson—that is clear.

I will try Keith Brown for a point of order. Keith Brown, are you able to make contact with us?

We will move on.

There were two members in the chamber who wanted to make points of order. One was the Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans.

The Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans (Graeme Dey): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. It is incumbent on all members of the Parliament to be accurate in the claims that they make. Ms Baillie made a claim that she cannot substantiate. I would like you to record that, Presiding Officer. Frankly, it was an outrageous assertion.

The Presiding Officer: Colleagues, I am sorry, but these are not points of order for the chair. I can rule on procedural matters, but this is in essence a debate that you are having among yourselves. It is not something to be conducted through the chair. Just because one person makes an accusation does not mean that a counter-accusation is helpful.

Are there any further points of order? Otherwise, I will announce the results of the vote.

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Earlier, during this unfortunate affair over accuracy in voting, you said that you cannot change the votes of individuals who cast their vote wrongly because they could not hear the result of an earlier vote on an amendment. I accept that. My point of order is to ask whether you have the power to rerun the current vote, so that they can cast their votes appropriately. I fully accept that it is your decision, but I wish to know whether you

have at your disposal the option of rerunning the vote, now that we have that informed clarity.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Doris. Yes, I have the power to rerun a vote, if necessary. However, in this case, I do not believe that it is necessary. Members have clarified the way in which they would have preferred to have voted.

I will now call the result of the division on motion S5M-23299, in the name of Richard Leonard.

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)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 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)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind)
 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)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)

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)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine 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)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (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)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (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)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 67, Against 53, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises the need to protect the population from the COVID-19 pandemic; appreciates the damage that tighter restrictions are having on Scotland's tourism and hospitality sector; calls on the Scottish Government to provide additional support to these sectors by reviewing the eligibility for COVID business grants and hardship grants and increasing available funding so that no hospitality or tourism business faces closure or job losses as a result of the pandemic, and considers that there is a need to work with trade unions to ensure that ongoing government support is being used to protect and improve workers' terms and conditions.

The Presiding Officer: Before we proceed, Neil Findlay and Alasdair Allan have points of order.

Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab): We have had issues with votes in the past—for example, we had an issue with the mesh vote. However, if people are going to play games as they have done tonight, our whole system will lack credibility. I appeal to members to think very carefully about what has gone on tonight.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Findlay. Again, I think that I am quite capable of interpreting Parliament's rules, but I appreciate the point.

Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Presiding Officer, regardless of Jackie Baillie's comments, I can only confirm what others have confirmed, which is that a number of us could not hear the results of votes. I am not making a point of order to question the result of the vote; I merely wish to ask what you are going to do to ensure that members are not again put in the position of being asked to vote on a motion without knowing whether it has been amended.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you very much, Dr Allan. Members should have made that absolutely clear before they voted. Members should not vote on something that they do not understand. I am aware that, in this case, there are sound issues. Several members have made a point of order to that very effect, and we will certainly investigate that issue.

I note that, if we add up the total number of members who made points of order, their votes would not have changed the outcome of the vote in question.

The next question is—I am sorry; Joan McAlpine has another point of order.

Joan McAlpine: I want to object to what Neil Findlay said when he suggested that we were playing games. I could not hear the result of the vote on the earlier amendment. I was not playing games—I genuinely could not hear it, because my

sound cut out. I think that the use of that phrase was unparliamentary language, to say the least.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you very much, Ms McAlpine. These accusations and counter-accusations are not taking us any further forward, and they are not points of order for me to rule on.

The next question is, that motion S5M-23321, in the name of Graeme Dey, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument—this is the motion on the census order—be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (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)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 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)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)

Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind)
 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)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (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)

Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 91, Against 27, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Census (Scotland) Amendment Order 2020 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: Keith Brown still wishes to make a point of order. I am going to try to make contact with him.

Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP): I wanted to make a point of order about 20 minutes ago, Presiding Officer. In the vote on the second Labour motion, I intended to vote no. I tried to say that at the time, but I was not able to have it recorded or to have my point of order taken, even though I intimated it. I had no problems in the most recent vote.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Brown. I am glad that we were able to hear that in the end. The way that you would have voted on that amendment is now officially on the record.

I propose to ask a single question on the other eight Parliamentary Bureau motions. Does any member object?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that motions S5M-23315 to S5M-23320, S5M-23322 and S5M-23323, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that, under Rule 12.3.3B of Standing Orders, the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee can meet, if necessary, at the same time as a meeting of the Parliament from 2pm to 4.30pm on Wednesday 18 November for the purpose of considering and agreeing its report on its inquiry into construction and procurement of ferry vessels in Scotland.

That the Parliament agrees that, under Rule 12.3.3B of Standing Orders, the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee can meet, if necessary, at the same time as a meeting of the Parliament on Tuesday 24 November during debate on the Health and Sport Committee's inquiry into Supply and demand for medicines, and during Members' Business, for the purpose of considering amendments at stage 2 to the United Kingdom Withdrawal from the European Union Continuity (Scotland) Bill.

That the Parliament agrees that the Code of Practice for the Welfare of Laying Hens (Revocation) (Scotland) Notice 2020 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Human Tissue (Excepted Body Parts) (Scotland) Regulations 2020 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Mandatory Use of Closed Circuit Television in Slaughterhouses (Scotland) Regulations 2020 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Welfare of Farmed Animals (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2020 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Public Health Information for Passengers Travelling to Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2020 (SSI 2020/328) be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (International Travel) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 19) Regulations 2020 (SSI 2020/330) be approved.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time. We will shortly move on to a members' business debate in the name of Alasdair Allan, on concerns regarding the islands housing market, but we will have a short pause to allow members, including me, to change seats. I remind members to observe social distancing while leaving the chamber, to wear masks at all times and to follow the one-way systems throughout the building.

Housing Market (Islands)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-22640, in the name of Alasdair Allan, on concerns regarding the islands housing market. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes the concerns expressed regarding rising property prices in many parts of the Highlands and Islands; understands that there has been an increase in interest in rural housing markets since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic; considers that rising house prices in areas with small numbers of available houses to buy is to the detriment of young island families, who are often unable to compete financially and, in some cases, find themselves up against bidders who are willing to buy without even setting foot on the island first; believes that this contributes to the continuing outward migration of young people; considers that the Highlands and Islands, and the Western Isles in particular, have worrying projections in terms of ageing and shrinking populations; recognises the importance of these communities for the maintenance of the Gaelic language; understands what it considers the pressing need for island communities to attract and welcome people from elsewhere; notes the belief that, if current demographic trends are to be reversed, the issues that young island families have, in terms of affordability and availability of housing, must be addressed, and notes the calls for Uist to be used as part of a trial where properties are advertised locally in the first instance.

18:39

Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): All Scotland's islands make their own distinctive cultural contribution to our country, but that depends on them being populated. All islands face their unique challenges, with different geographies, transport links and levels of average income.

Tonight, however, I want to raise another island problem, which is housing. This debate has been prompted by a campaign led by Pàdruig Morrison and a number of other young constituents in Uist. They all want to live on an island and contribute to its social and economic fabric, and perhaps to set up their own business or to croft. Some were born and raised in the islands and want to return; some have migrated there, and others still wish to. They have all identified finding somewhere to live as the single biggest obstacle to those ambitions.

Part of the solution is social rented housing. In the Western Isles, there remains a housing waiting list of around 400, and the Scottish Government's recent unprecedented offer of £25 million to build new houses locally will certainly make a very welcome impact on that list. However, we will need robust systems to measure demand for housing in rural areas. Almost by definition, no

record of such demand exists in areas where there have been few, if any, social rented houses to apply for. Unless we get that right, we run the risk of building only in a few more urban areas.

Aside from the issue of rented housing, islands face unique and growing problems when it comes to the supply of houses to buy. I will explain what I mean by that, using a couple of—admittedly extreme—examples. A small house—with two bedrooms, I think—in a particularly scenic part of my constituency recently sold for £385,000. A few miles up the road, the tenancy of a croft—by that, I mean not the ownership of the land but just the opportunity to take on the tenancy, with its associated right to buy—was recently advertised for £200,000. I stress that that croft had, as yet, no house on it at all.

I do not claim that those situations are typical of all areas across all islands. However, if that trend were to catch on, it is clear that, as Pàdruig Morrison has pointed out, young families in the islands could abandon any prospect of ever buying a home. Pàdruig told me:

“We have first-hand examples of ... young people, professionally qualified, putting in offers for houses. Despite communicating to sellers the importance of population retention, cash-rich buyers often jump in front and buy houses which often have not been viewed. In the worst examples, the island has not yet even been visited by them!”

There are multiple reasons for the rise in prices in some areas. Most recently, it has probably been driven partly by the idea—entirely ill founded—that islands are somehow completely unaffected by Covid. More generally, the market has been distorted by the sharp rise in the number of second homes and short-term lets.

Before I go further, I want to make it clear that I am not making a case against tourism. In fact, I welcome the recent growth of tourism in the islands and recognise that self-catering accommodation is a very important part of that. Equally, I am not having a go at those who are retired. Nonetheless, there must be some houses in the islands that are available to buy at a reasonable price for people who want to live there all year round during their working lives.

In parts of Harris, holiday homes and second homes now account between them for almost 60 per cent of all houses. I understand that the same is perhaps becoming true in Tiree, among other places. There are some communities in my constituency—only some, I stress—where there are now no new children entering primary schools. No affordable housing ultimately means closed schools.

That point is underlined by a report that was published today by Community Land Scotland, entitled “Home Delivery: Community Led Housing

in rural Scotland”. The report finds that the lack of access to affordable housing for local people is exacerbated by increasing numbers of houses being turned into holiday homes and short-term lets in popular holiday destinations. It also highlights just how valuable communities have found the rural and islands housing funds in getting affordable housing to where it is needed. I would be grateful if the minister was able to speak to the future of those funds in his closing remarks.

Lest there be any room for wilful misunderstanding, I make it clear that nobody is making a case against people moving to the islands. I am an incomer to the islands myself—a fact that I seem to remember being raised politically in some quarters, albeit to little effect, during the election of 2007. In fact, the islands desperately need more new people, even just to fill the job vacancies that are projected to come up over the next few years. The islands are a wonderful and welcoming place in which to live. The point is that we need a diverse mix of people of different ages, skills and backgrounds to ensure that we have an adequate workforce. One of the biggest obstacles to achieving that, which has been cited by many employers, is a lack of housing.

I welcome the measures, on which the Scottish Government is currently consulting, to give local authorities the power to regulate the number of short-term lets in any single community. I would personally make the case for a similar power to regulate the number of second homes. I realise that I have come to the debate without a list of detailed solutions, but I think that it is only fair to give a public airing to the fears that many communities now—quietly, but increasingly—express to me. Those places want to retain the vitality that marks out a community from a resort.

We can look to other places for ideas. In Norway, for example, I understand that many rural areas operate two entirely separate housing markets, with one list containing houses that are available for sale as year-round residences only. I believe that Cornwall and other places have made efforts to deal with similar issues.

We could look at the level of support for open market shared equity; the area-based limit for a four-apartment house under the OMSE scheme currently stands at £100,000 in the Western Isles. We need to think about placing certain restrictions on grants that are designed specifically to bring empty homes back into the housing market, in order to ensure that those properties are not used as holiday homes or second homes.

Whatever solutions we arrive at, I hope that members on all sides of the chamber can agree that Pàdruig Morrison and his friends have given us some pretty convincing reasons why we cannot

leave the future of our communities in the Highlands and Islands to the mercy of an unrestrained free market in houses. *[Applause.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Dr Allan. In case you did not hear it, you got a wee clap there. We move to the open debate—I ask members for speeches of around four minutes, please. I am aware that, because of the late start, Kenneth Gibson has to leave us fairly soon, so I call him first, followed by Edward Mountain.

18:47

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I congratulate my colleague Alasdair Allan on bringing the debate to the chamber; I know that housing is a topic of real concern to the communities that he represents, and I appreciate that. I also appreciate the Presiding Officer allowing me to leave before the end of the debate because of the late start, as I have a meeting to discuss ferry matters with my island constituents.

The motion that was lodged by Alasdair Allan mentions the threat of losing Gaelic as a living local language. As the situation in my constituency demonstrates, that threat is all too real. The 1901 census indicates that between 50 and 74 per cent of west Arran's population, and between 25 and 49 per cent of the population in the east, spoke Gaelic. By 1992, however, Arran's last native Gaelic speaker had sadly passed away. Such a loss must be prevented in Gaelic's Western Isles heartland.

I have raised the issue of island depopulation in the chamber previously, and island constituents continue to contact me about it. Over decades, there has been an on-going shift in island demography as a result of new incoming residents, who are often financially established and are able to buy family homes with relative ease. They have an economic advantage over indigenous working-age islanders, who cannot compete on price. That causes young islanders to move to the mainland, often never to return.

On Arran, following such displacement, only around a third of the 4,600 islanders are native to the island. Although newcomers often have skills and infuse the community with energy and ideas, they are disproportionately elderly. A huge number of properties are now second homes or holiday homes, and planning restrictions further diminish the options that are available. The lack of affordable housing for younger people makes it more difficult to meet the demand for workers, particularly in health and social care settings, including care at home.

I sympathise with the suggestion of a tiered system whereby properties are first advertised only locally, but how could such a system be

implemented where it impacts on a private transaction? An owner who wishes to move on always wants the best price possible. Measures to encourage folk to sell local are worth exploring. However, a better way to counter the shortage would be to build more affordable homes.

I was delighted when the Scottish Government awarded £3.612 million to the Arran Development Trust last year from its rural and islands housing funds. The new-build development at Brathwic Terrace in Brodick has a total budget of £6.5 million; it was the largest grant awarded to a community group from the fund and is part of a wider £8.5 million package to provide 43 affordable homes for rent. Arran Development Trust has also applied for £400,000 from the Scottish land fund to buy development land at Rowarden, and I wish it every success with its application.

Nevertheless, continuing to build properties while others lie empty is not sustainable or desirable. Particularly in west Arran, there are numerous private properties that require more investment than many sellers or potential buyers can afford. Who will modernise, rewire and replumb homes that are still in the same condition as they were in the 1960s or 1970s? Such properties often do not even make it on to the market and fall into further disrepair.

Through Home Energy Scotland, the Scottish Government has made up to £38,500 per home available to make energy efficiency improvements. Although it is enormously helpful that grants are available and loans are interest free, they are only available to owner-occupiers. Properties needing the most work often cannot be occupied before renovation is complete.

Improved grants for conversion and restrictions on which properties receive grants, so that they cannot be used for holiday or second homes, would be helpful, as would a fund to purchase such homes, which tend to be scattered around islands, for social rent, rather than having affordable homes only in mini-housing schemes.

In 2013, the Scottish ministers provided local authorities with discretion to vary council tax on unoccupied properties, a measure that saved those renovating or trying to sell thousands of pounds. Initially, a discount of between 10 and 50 per cent is required, but once a property is unoccupied for 12 months, or 24 months if actively marketed for sale or let, an increase of up to 100 per cent may be imposed to encourage owners to bring the home back into use.

However, although guidance provides discretion to consider the location that a dwelling is in and examine the circumstances case by case, evidence to the Local Government and

Communities Committee shows that some local authorities do not exercise enough flexibility, even where empty homes officers are in post.

A scheme to reduce single occupancy in underoccupied housing through incentives and elderly-friendly housing developments would be of help.

We value Scotland's island communities and must enable young people to stay on their beautiful islands, raise children and sustain their communities and culture.

18:52

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I thank Alasdair Allan for bringing this important debate to the chamber. I did not intend, when I got up this morning, to speak in the debate, but when I thought about it a bit more, I realised that the issue is one that was driven home to the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee when we visited various islands during consideration of the Islands (Scotland) Bill.

I am sympathetic to many of the points that Alasdair Allan raised, and I firmly agree that action must be taken to stop rural depopulation. Part of that action definitely involves housing. It is not a magic bullet to solve the overarching problems that cause rural depopulation, but it is an important issue that must be taken seriously.

As Alasdair Allan notes in his motion, there has been a significant uptick in property interest in the Western Isles, and across much of the Highlands and Islands region, during the Covid-19 pandemic, with interest not only from England, but from countries and regions further afield, including Hong Kong. Much of that has been described as "urban flight": people seeking to get away from densely populated areas during the pandemic.

Although I am sure that all members in the Parliament welcome migration, we know from experience that, all too often, property that is purchased in the region is not to be lived in permanently, as Dr Allan said, but is either to be lived in for a few weeks a year, or to be rented out to others who are visiting temporarily. Of course, I accept that tourism is important for the economy of the Highlands and Islands, but it cannot and should not come with detriment to those who live, work and have families in the region.

According to the Scottish Government's national islands plan, the population of Orkney and Shetland is set to fall by 2.2 per cent by 2041, and that of the Western Isles is set to fall by a staggering 14 per cent. That is deeply worrying to me.

I am aware of the worries and concerns that are expressed by people who live in our island

communities across Argyll and Bute and the islands. Although it is evident that there is a problem with housing being bought for use as holiday homes or for self-catering accommodation, for example, it is also clear that we are not building enough new and affordable houses in our island communities.

I know from casework that there are many empty properties, including old and neglected croft homes, that could be brought back into use, but have not been.

Part of the problem appears to be the ineffectiveness of the rural and islands housing funds. Although the intentions appear to be good, a recent freedom of information response showed that the two schemes have delivered a total of only 68 new homes in the past four years, which is well short of the target of 500 houses that should have been delivered by the rural housing fund alone.

I am led to understand that the rural housing fund uses a cost per unit of £83,000 for affordable housing, despite the fact that, as I am sure Dr Allan knows, the costs of building a house on an island are much higher. That amount might have to be increased so that we can afford to build more affordable homes across our islands. In addition to that, we should be more mindful of the need for more social housing in our island communities.

I reiterate my thanks to Dr Allan for bringing the motion to the chamber, which can spark a wider debate in civic Scotland about how best we can preserve our population in rural and remote parts of the country. Our solutions must be innovative, and it is clear that the creation of new high-quality affordable housing will be key to that. I hope that the debate will stimulate that conversation, and I look forward to taking forward some of the ideas that have been mentioned in it.

18:56

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I, too, congratulate Alasdair Allan on securing the debate, and I pay tribute to the young people whom he talked about in his speech, who have raised the issue recently with many of us. They highlighted their experience of trying to find affordable housing in island and rural communities.

This week, they contacted us again to say that the situation is getting worse. Young people who moved away for further and higher education want to come home, but they cannot. Those young people want to live and work in the communities in which they were brought up. They are also being forced out because the jobs and salaries that are available locally mean that they cannot compete with people who have spare cash for a holiday home. Those young people are at the beginning of

their careers and have not accumulated the wealth that is needed to compete with people who can afford a second home.

When I visited West Harris Trust, I was told that when it bought the estate there were fears that nearly half of local housing would become second homes. Not surprisingly, therefore, their top priority was to build houses. Many community landowners have done the same; indeed, communities that do not own their land have been setting up trusts so that they are able to build houses. Therefore, Community Land Scotland's report on the issue, which was published today, is timely.

Sadly, it is not a new problem—it has been a problem for decades—but it is getting worse. It causes the break-up of communities and families, and young people being forced to leave causes a brain drain and depopulation. Covid-19 has made the problem worse through its impact on the economy of rural and island communities. It has caused greater disparity between what local people can afford and what people who have even more spending power due to the pandemic can afford.

The young people who wrote to us expressing their concerns about access to homes asked that houses for sale be advertised locally before being advertised further afield as holiday homes. That suggestion has merit; in their submission to us, the young people highlighted a case in which that had worked well. However, we could go further. Alasdair Allan mentioned Norway; the Channel Islands, as well, operates two housing markets.

We could have a holiday home market that is proportionate to the housing that is available in the local housing market. Every home that is built with assistance from the public purse should be available only to locals. That would include council houses, housing association houses and homes that are built with help from a croft house grant or other public incentives. People could also opt in to the local housing market, making it clear that a house is to become a family home.

We also need opportunities to build houses. The croft house grant scheme is not fit for purpose, because it does not reflect the fact that people who run crofts also need other employment opportunities. Too often, I have heard of young people being turned down by the scheme because they might want to include an extra bedroom for bed and breakfast accommodation, an office for another job, or a workshop, depending on what they do. That needs to be put right.

We also need to ensure that young people in rural areas have access to good-quality well-paid jobs to allow them to get the mortgages that they need in order to compete. Therefore, I ask the Scottish Government to protect good-quality jobs,

such as those of air traffic controllers, in our island and rural communities. It is not good enough that those jobs are being taken out of our communities and, with them, young families. The survival of Gaelic depends on growing communities of Gaelic speakers, and that depends on there being a solution to that problem.

The Scottish Government depopulation task force has not met since January; it needs to be given priority. We need to decentralise civil service jobs and encourage public bodies to ensure that their staffing structure supports rural communities. We cannot wait; that work needs to be carried out urgently. To do nothing will fail our island and rural communities.

19:01

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green):

I join others in congratulating Alasdair Allan on bringing this important motion before us. There is nothing more important than housing. Everyone needs to live somewhere and we hope that that somewhere is a home.

Like others, I am keen to see responsible tourism in the Highlands, but no one needs to holiday in a home. I am not a fan of the term “second home” or “holiday home”, because it is an additional property; a home is different and we must set that language against the fact that many people have no home or no prospect of a home.

The motion talks about the islands' housing market; the market forces are the problem that we are dealing with, and I am keen that we separate market forces from the fundamental human need for shelter and the role that the state plays in its provision, in the form of good-quality social housing. Like Dr Allan, I am pleased that those millions have gone to the Western Isles for additional housing, but it is a drop in the ocean.

I commend Pàdruig Morrison and the other campaigners for their work. We know that rural housing is closely linked to population retention and that the issue is not exclusive to the northern or western islands. I am from rural Lochaber, and there is far more housing there than there was when I was a boy but, because of the nature of the occupants, there is no school or post office. Properties that were previously tied to jobs—on an estate or, more commonly, in forestry or the hydroelectric scheme—have been sold off, and therein lies a problem.

The statutory obligation for assessing housing needs lies with the local authority and, like Dr Allan, I am keen that the broadest consideration is taken. I had a look at the “Outer Hebrides Local Housing Strategy 2017-2022”; it has all the right words and they are all in the right order, but we hear from Community Land Scotland's report that

islanders fear “economic clearance” and there is some justification for that. The report also says that

“Young islanders could not compete with offers made by buyers from elsewhere in the UK.”

Again, the problem is market forces; why should they have to compete? We should be housing our population. In the north of Mull, there are plenty of houses but very few homes.

My colleague Rhoda Grant touched on the West Harris Trust, which became involved in the project for that very reason. Staffin Community Trust said:

“We refused to sleepwalk into becoming a retirement village”.

That trust has done great work there by providing the first affordable houses in 21 years; they will house seven families, which makes the school resilient.

There are lots of suggestions for what we can do, and a number of them have been shared with us. There are limitations to some of them. Control areas and planning requirements for short-term lets, which my colleague Andy Wightman has talked a lot about, would be very important.

With regard to the decentralisation of jobs, many of us are conducting the business of Parliament from our houses, so there is no reason why many of the jobs in the public sector that are currently being undertaken from home cannot be done from home henceforth. Jobs and houses go hand in hand.

The importance of the issue for the Gaelic language must not be underestimated. We need a massive house-building programme, and we need to involve Highlands and Islands Enterprise, with a focus on people. Any impact assessments that have been demanded by the islands suggest that we do that. Let us house our island populations, and let us protect and sustain the heart of the Gàidhealtachd.

Hugh Ross from the Staffin Community Trust said:

“The sound of children playing in the gardens will be a very welcome noise - that of a community with a bright future.”

Tha gu dearbh—yes indeed.

19:05

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): I, too, thank Alasdair Allan for securing the debate. The issue is hugely important, and I am pleased that we are able to debate it today.

Although the debate appears to have been inspired by issues that may be more immediate in the Western Isles, the motion recognises that

availability of affordable housing is essential if young people are to make the islands their home, and to prevent population decline. It is right that a strategic objective is included in the national islands plan; I would be interested if the minister could give an update on progress in that regard.

Housing issues can be some of the most challenging and frustrating casework that we receive—I am sure that other members feel the same. Shetland is my home, and it matters to me. It is a beautiful part of the world, but beautiful scenery alone is not enough to encourage skilled workers to make the move north. There are skills shortages in Shetland. Efforts to invest in, develop and attract the highly skilled workforce that will be needed for Shetland’s just transition will be wasted if people do not have the opportunity to make a home in the islands and to contribute to our economy for the long term.

I know of people who relocated to Shetland to fill job vacancies but who, unfortunately, might now have to leave the isles because they cannot afford the high private rents or face a long wait for social housing in their chosen area. I know two families who are keen to return to Shetland to work and raise their children there, but they are experiencing similar issues.

Alasdair Allan is right to say that a lack of housing impacts on the viability of schools and other services. That is no criticism of local authority staff, who are working hard and doing their best for people with the resources that they have. There are long-standing issues across the country with changing demographics and underoccupancy.

Affordable housing is more than just a physical building. The cost of living in Shetland is up to 60 per cent higher than the UK average, and fuel poverty is high. It is vital that homes are energy efficient and that people can get a good broadband connection and mobile signal where they live. This year has demonstrated, more than ever, how essential that is.

Island living is impossible without good transport links—inter-island as well as lifeline connections to the mainland. The social housing that is available is often not in areas close to family and friends or to work, and bus timetables might not work for people who work shifts. If the Government invests in our most remote communities, that can change. Properly addressing housing issues needs joined-up thinking on the private market and social housing provision, and engagement with local community groups and between local government and national Government.

Community groups need to be able to make use of the rural and islands housing funds. Development trusts have often struggled with

administrative barriers to that kind of funding, and no homes have been built in Shetland so far using the scheme. The islands housing fund should open doors—literally and figuratively—for people in communities such as mine. The Scottish Government must do far more to remove the obstacles that I have described and to support communities in developing applications.

We need a commitment from ministers not to claw back much-needed resources in the event that projects take a little longer to deliver. The Government should consider providing incentives to ensure that many of the neglected and vacant properties across the country are renovated and brought up to an acceptable standard.

There is an opportunity to ensure that island communities get the affordable housing that they need, and the Scottish Government can do more to help them to seize that opportunity.

19:09

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning (Kevin Stewart): I offer plaudits to Dr Allan for securing today's debate.

Areas of rural Scotland are often classed as the best, happiest and, of course, most beautiful places to live. However, as Dr Allan and others have highlighted, rural living also brings certain challenges, including larger numbers of second homes and communities where people are on lower incomes. In some places, for far too long, there has been a lack of affordable homes, which can have a major effect on access to suitable housing.

We need to grow the Scottish economy and we need to sustain our rural and island communities, to enable communities and businesses, as well as the tourism sector, to thrive. We need to protect and safeguard the diverse and cultural characteristics of communities while supporting a place-based approach to rural development.

During the consultations on the national islands plan, concerns that island communities had about depopulation were made clear and, in response, the national islands plan, which was published last year, included specific commitments to address population decline and ensure a healthy, balanced population profile. That supports our wider commitment to publish in early 2021 a population strategy to tackle the demographic challenges for Scotland as a whole.

We are also committed to supporting our rural and island communities through our reforms to the planning system and we recognise the critical role that appropriate housing can play. The Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 introduced new duties for planning to help to increase the population of rural

areas of Scotland, particularly depopulated areas. We have also begun the process of developing national planning framework 4 and we are exploring new, proactive policy options for planning to enable development that supports dynamic rural economies and helps to sustain and support our rural communities.

I appeal to elected members in island communities and remote rural communities to be brave when they sit on the planning committees and make decisions. They should make sure that they are voting for the right development to take place to help folk in their community.

We also have an important planning consultation closing tomorrow on our proposals for extending permitted development rights. The proposed changes would increase the range of developments that can be carried out without the need for a full planning application.

We know that good-quality, affordable housing is essential to help attract and retain people in Scotland's remote rural and island communities and that providing affordable housing in those areas presents different challenges than in urban areas. A small number of homes can make a big difference to the sustainability of a local economy.

Our affordable housing supply programme supports the delivery of affordable housing for rent or purchase across urban and rural areas of Scotland. The programme has grant subsidy levels that recognise those rural challenges. Edward Mountain mentioned subsidy levels. There is flexibility built into all that we do because we recognise that it is more costly to build in remote rural and island communities. The flexibility of the grant subsidy levels has led to projects that would never have taken place had we had a fixed approach. Places that have benefited include Ulva Ferry in Mull and Horgabost in west Harris, with which Dr Allan is familiar. So, although we encourage maximising value when it comes to delivering affordable housing, the higher cost of rural and islands development is well understood.

This Government is committed to affordable housing, having now delivered nearly 96,000 affordable homes since 2007, and until Covid-19 we were on track to meet our commitment to deliver 50,000 affordable homes in this session of Parliament. Some of those homes are in places such as Shetland. In King Harald Street a new development is about to be completed and there is also Gaet-A-Gott, of which I am sure that Beatrice Wishart is well aware. I take my hat off to the Hjalldand Housing Association for the work that it has done in bringing forward more difficult sites such as Staneyhill.

In the first years of this session of Parliament, the affordable housing supply programme

delivered more than 4,800 affordable homes in rural and island areas and invested more than £55 million in the islands alone. As has been mentioned, we brought into play the rural and islands housing funds to address some of the challenges associated with the provision of housing in rural Scotland. We launched those £30 million funds in 2016, complementing our existing significant investment in affordable housing in rural areas.

Many members will have seen Community Land Scotland's report, which was published today and written by David Ross. It highlights the benefits that there have been to many families across rural and island Scotland because of investment from those funds. I recognise that some people think that investment from the funds has been too slow, but we have had to allow communities to develop the schemes that are essential for them at their own pace. It is important that the schemes are community led and have the backing and support of organisations such as Community Land Scotland.

Provision of housing through the funds, which are available to a wide range of housing providers, continues to grow, increasing the supply of affordable housing in remote rural Scotland and on our islands. Given the long lead-in times and the complexities involved with rural housing development, it is encouraging to see that the momentum of those funds has built steadily from a standing start, with real progress on the number of homes approved in the past couple of years. In a small community, providing one or two homes is as important as providing a large-scale development in a city. Last summer, I visited a small development funded by our islands housing fund at Gravir on the Isle of Lewis. That development is hugely important in allowing that community to grow.

I recognise that the rural and islands housing funds are delivering for rural communities and providing an additional funding route for people who are not able to access traditional affordable housing funding. I agree with the assessment of Savills in its work for the Scottish Land Commission, which described the funds as a "game changer". That positive view is reflected through our recent review of the funds. I am, therefore, pleased to announce the continuation of the rural and islands housing funds beyond March 2021, with up to £30 million available to support those demand-led schemes as part of the future five-year affordable housing programme. I hope that that will be welcomed by the members here and recognised as part of our commitment to rural and island housing.

Although tourism contributes positively to local economies and communities in many areas of

rural Scotland, we recognise that in certain areas, particularly tourist hotspots, high numbers of short-term lets can make it harder for people to find homes to live in.

That is why, on 14 September, we published a consultation paper setting out our detailed proposals for the regulation of short-term lets in Scotland. The consultation will gather final views on the new legislation giving local authorities powers to license short-term lets and introduce control areas before regulations are laid in Parliament in December, which will come into force in April 2021.

We are working on a vision for how our homes and communities should look and feel in 2040, and on the options and choices that we need to make to get us there. We want to ensure that everyone in Scotland has access to a high-quality and sustainable home that is safe, warm and affordable, and that meets their needs. We have consulted widely with communities across rural, urban and island locations so that we can plot and put in place a route map that will stand the test of time. We want to create a shared vision for housing that covers all of Scotland—cities, towns, Lowlands, Highlands and islands.

As a Government, we are committed to doing all that we can to help rural communities thrive. We remain committed to working with our rural and island communities. We will continue to listen on issues such as council tax, land and buildings transaction tax, and the pressures that are on them, and we will continue to develop and deliver the solutions that are needed for different rural and island populations.

As Scotland's housing minister, I have made ensuring that we drive up housing in all of Scotland part of my wish list. I have had the great pleasure of visiting many remote rural and island places to see what we have done, but also to see what is required. I will continue to do so for as long as I am in this post. I thank Dr Allan once again for bringing this debate to the chamber.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you very much, minister. That was quite a seven minutes, but it was all very interesting.

Meeting closed at 19:22.

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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