



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Meeting of the Parliament (Hybrid)

Wednesday 18 November 2020

Session 5



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

Information on the Scottish Parliament's copyright policy can be found on the website - www.parliament.scot or by contacting Public Information on 0131 348 5000

Wednesday 18 November 2020

CONTENTS

	Col.
BUSINESS MOTION	1
<i>Motion moved—[Graeme Dey]—and agreed to.</i>	
PORTFOLIO QUESTION TIME	2
TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND CONNECTIVITY	2
Union Connectivity Review.....	2
Transport Infrastructure (Review).....	3
Edinburgh South Suburban Rail Line (Passenger Services).....	4
South Edinburgh Metro and Light Rail Service.....	5
Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 (Implementation).....	6
Public Transport (Face Coverings).....	7
ScotRail (Service Reductions).....	8
Bus Services (Covid-19).....	9
JUSTICE AND THE LAW OFFICERS	11
Reconviction Statistics (2017-18 Cohort).....	11
Assaults Against Police Officers (Recording).....	12
Emergency Workers (Attacks).....	13
Court Proceedings (Impact of Postponement on Mental Health).....	14
Drug Offences (Glasgow).....	16
Police Strength Statistics.....	18
SAFE SCHOOLS	21
<i>Motion moved—[Ross Greer].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[John Swinney].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Jamie Greene].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Iain Gray].</i>	
Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green).....	21
The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney).....	24
Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con).....	27
Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab).....	29
Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD).....	31
Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green).....	32
Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP).....	34
Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con).....	35
Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab).....	37
Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP).....	38
Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab).....	40
Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con).....	42
John Swinney.....	43
Ross Greer.....	45
DECLARATION OF A NATURE EMERGENCY	49
<i>Motion moved—[Mark Ruskell].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Roseanna Cunningham].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Liz Smith].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Claudia Beamish].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Liam McArthur].</i>	
Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green).....	49
The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Roseanna Cunningham).....	51
Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con).....	53
Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab).....	56
Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD).....	58
Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green).....	59
Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP).....	60
Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con).....	62
Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab).....	64
Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green).....	65

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP).....	67
Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab).....	68
Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con).....	70
The Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment (Mairi Gougeon).....	72
Mark Ruskell.....	75
BUSINESS MOTIONS	78
<i>Motions moved—[Graeme Dey]—and agreed to.</i>	
PARLIAMENTARY BUREAU MOTION	81
<i>Motion moved—[Graeme Dey].</i>	
DECISION TIME	82
PANCREATIC CANCER AWARENESS MONTH	96
<i>Motion debated—[Clare Adamson].</i>	
Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP).....	96
John Scott (Ayr) (Con).....	99
Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP).....	101
David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab).....	102
Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con).....	104
Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP).....	106
Gordon Lindhurst (Lothian) (Con).....	108
The Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing (Joe FitzPatrick).....	109

Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 18 November 2020

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

Business Motion

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): Good afternoon. Before we begin, I remind members that social distancing measures are in place in the chamber and right across the campus. Please take care to observe those measures over the course of this afternoon's business, including when entering and exiting the chamber.

The first item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-23411, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out changes to tomorrow's business. I ask any member who wishes to speak against the motion to press their request-to-speak button now.

No member has asked to speak against the motion, so the question is—[*Interruption.*] Oh, yes. I do not know what I would do without Catherine Fergusson. I invite Graeme Dey to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees to the following revisions to the programme of business on Thursday 19 November 2020—

delete

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:
Constitution, Europe and External Affairs

insert

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
Constitution, Europe and External Affairs

after

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

insert

followed by Scottish Government Debate: COVID-19

delete

5.05 pm Decision Time

and insert

6.30 pm Decision Time—[*Graeme Dey.*]

Motion agreed to.

Portfolio Question Time

Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity

14:01

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani): The next item of business is portfolio question time. I would like us to get through all the questions, so I would prefer short and succinct questions, and answers to match. The first portfolio is transport, infrastructure and connectivity.

Union Connectivity Review

1. Michelle Ballantyne (South Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what engagement Transport Scotland has had with the United Kingdom Government regarding the union connectivity review. (S5O-04753)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sorry—I am a bit dithery this afternoon—but I should also have said that questions 1 and 2 have been grouped together.

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity (Michael Matheson): Officials take part in general fortnightly meetings with their counterparts at the Department for Transport, at which DFT officials have provided high-level updates on their plans for the study.

Transport infrastructure is a devolved matter. Decisions on investment will be taken by the Scottish Government through the infrastructure investment plan and the second strategic transport projects review.

Michelle Ballantyne: What I really want to understand is whether the cabinet secretary is going to take part in the independent review. For those of us who live, work and run businesses in the south of Scotland, connectivity across the border is extremely important. It is not a political matter—it is just a necessity.

Is the cabinet secretary taking part in the review? If not, why not?

Michael Matheson: I want to make it clear what the union connectivity review is about. It is a process that was set up without any consultation with the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government or the Northern Ireland Government. Its remit and chair were decided by the UK Government, without any engagement with the devolved Governments, and it will make recommendations in areas that are the responsibility of the Scottish Parliament directly to

UK Government ministers for them to make decisions on what the priorities should be.

The review was set up alongside section 46 of the United Kingdom Internal Market Bill, which sets out clear mechanisms for UK Government ministers to make direct decisions on infrastructure, when such decisions are clearly devolved to the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland Governments, without any engagement with the devolved Administrations.

The concerns that I have are not just some sort of Scottish National Party conspiracy; they are set out in a joint letter from the Scottish Government, my colleague Ken Skates MS, who is the Minister for Economy, Transport and North Wales in the Welsh Government, and Nicola Mallon MLA, who is the Minister for Infrastructure in the Northern Ireland Executive and a Social Democratic and Labour Party member. In that letter, we set out our concerns about the approach that the UK Government has taken to the whole issue.

It is nothing more than a blatant power grab and an attempt to overreach into the powers of this Parliament. We have a very clear process for deciding what the infrastructure and, in particular, transport priorities are in Scotland, and it includes looking at cross-border connectivity. I wrote to Grant Shapps on 6 March, setting out a range of cross-border actions that could be taken to address and improve connectivity across the border, and what have I had to date? No action on any of them.

We will make sure that we improve connectivity across Scotland and across the border into England and beyond, but the process for deciding that is for this Parliament, not for the UK Government.

Transport Infrastructure (Review)

7. Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what assistance it is providing to the United Kingdom Government with its review of transport infrastructure. (S5O-04759)

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity (Michael Matheson): Transport infrastructure is a devolved matter. Decisions on investments will be taken by the Scottish Government through the infrastructure investment plan and the second strategic transport projects review. Our transport investment will improve lives, boost our economy, support communities and work towards net zero carbon.

The union connectivity review was established without any meaningful discussion. I and my counterparts in Northern Ireland and Wales wrote to express our serious concern about the UK Government seeking to undermine the devolved

settlement and establish decision-making processes in devolved areas. To date, those concerns have not been adequately addressed by the UK Government.

Finlay Carson: I say to the minister that I am—as so many, including in his party, are—tired of hearing of his commitment to the south-west of Scotland while, in practice, it has received little more than 0.5 per cent of national infrastructure spend. His SNP Government has been in power for 13 years. At every election, it has made empty promises about infrastructure improvements, but it has only delivered more studies.

Will he commit today to a firm date on which my constituents will know when we will see significant upgrades to the A75 and A77? Will he put petty politics to one side and commit to working with the UK Government to look at ways of jointly improving those vital routes?

Michael Matheson: As the member will be well aware, the process for deciding on strategic transport investment is through the STPR 2 process, not just for the south-west of Scotland but for the south-east, the central belt, the north-east, the north-west and our island communities, all of which require infrastructure investment in areas of transport. That is the process that will be used for the south-west of Scotland, as it will be used for the rest of the country.

The member makes reference to the idea of petty party politics on the part of the SNP. He should reflect on the fact that not just the SNP-led Scottish Government but also the Labour-led Welsh Government and the multiparty Northern Ireland Executive have all raised the same concerns about the power grab that the UK Government is taking forward. It is seeking to undermine the devolved settlement.

We now know the UK Government's view of devolution. We know that at first hand from what the Prime Minister had to say. He said that it is "a disaster". It is very clear that a strategy is being employed, through the connectivity review, that is about undermining the devolved settlement across the UK, and we will not help those who are seeking to do that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Questions 2 and 5 have also been grouped.

Edinburgh South Suburban Rail Line (Passenger Services)

2. Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has to undertake a feasibility study into reopening passenger services on Edinburgh's south suburban rail line. (S5O-04754)

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity (Michael Matheson): The reopening of the Edinburgh south suburban rail line for passengers is being considered as part of an option to expand Edinburgh's mass transit network within the second strategic transport projects review. The review is expected to conclude in the autumn of 2021.

Miles Briggs: Edinburgh and the south-east of Scotland are seeing significant growth in population, so there is a real and pressing need for a long-term plan for investment in local transport infrastructure projects such as the south suburban project. Will the minister agree to meet interested groups across Edinburgh and a cross-party delegation to consider the options for transport projects across the Lothian region, including the potential introduction of passenger services?

Michael Matheson: That issue has already been identified as part of the pre-appraisal work for STPR2, which has been shared with regional transport partners, the city council and other Lothian councils. It is now for them to look at the details of that and consider what further work is necessary in order to take it forward. That will then be considered as part of STPR2.

Notwithstanding the member's invitation to meet to discuss matters, I would encourage him to engage with the regional transport partners, who are responsible for taking forward this type of issue. Once we are at the point of decisions needing to be made on the matter, I will be more than happy to engage with the member and others who have a particular interest in the issue.

That is all part of the wider work that Edinburgh is undertaking to develop a mass transit plan, in order to support transportation across Edinburgh and beyond. Clearly, the matter needs further consideration, but it is certainly being actively considered at the moment.

South Edinburgh Metro and Light Rail Service

5. **Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will examine the viability of having a south Edinburgh metro and light rail service. (S5O-04757)

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity (Michael Matheson): The expansion of Edinburgh's mass transit network is currently being considered as part of the on-going second strategic transport projects review, which is expected to conclude in Autumn 2021.

Daniel Johnson: I ask the minister to forgive me for asking him to repeat himself. I am pleased

that the Government is looking at the matter. I have with me a copy of one of the last studies on opening the south suburban loop. The study was clear that such a project would have a net present value of between £13 million and £27 million, and it acknowledged that the estimate of the benefits was probably cautious. Since then, the trams have commenced and outperformed their financial projections and the Borders railway has opened and outperformed its financial projections, which undoubtedly means that the south sub loop would be a more successful project were it to reopen.

Will the minister commit to making sure that any study looks at the synergies between those projects? I look forward to the Scottish Government getting on board with the south sub loop next autumn.

Michael Matheson: The member raises an important issue. No strategic transport project sits on its own. The project needs to be considered alongside other interventions that can help to improve transportation across Edinburgh and the Lothians as a whole, and consideration must also be given to how they will be integrated into the wider transport system across the country. That is why it is so important that we have a process that brings these things together, so that we can prioritise them on the basis of what is necessary. The STPR2 process is the way in which we do that.

The elements that the member has raised have been considered in the drafting of the pre-appraisal work and are now being considered by the regional transport working groups. They will look at what the priorities are and at whether those options can be further developed.

I encourage the member to engage with the regional transport partners to explore the proposal further. Clearly, as we move forward with STPR2, the proposal could fit into the wider range of work that will be necessary in Edinburgh and the Lothians as a whole to prioritise what strategic transport interventions are needed to improve transportation across the region.

Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 (Implementation)

3. **Mary Fee (West Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government when the full provisions of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 will be implemented. (S5O-04755)

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity (Michael Matheson): The implementation of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 has been affected by the Covid pandemic, which has impacted particularly on the development of guidance and regulations and the related consultation processes. I indicated

at my appearance before the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee on 2 September 2020 that there is limited space in this parliamentary session to implement the 2019 act, which means that not all of its provisions will come into effect in this session. However, officials have now recommenced work on all aspects of the 2019 act, and the Parliament will be kept updated on that accordingly.

Mary Fee: The 2019 act was passed more than a year ago. Many key features, such as low-emission zones, a pavement parking ban and the passing to local authorities of powers over municipal bus companies have yet to be actioned. The 2019 act has made little or no difference to anyone's life, at a time when bus companies are cutting more routes, air pollution is rising and parking on pavements remains a serious problem. I ask the cabinet secretary again: when will the Government take action on the 2019 act?

Michael Matheson: I recognise Mary Fee's frustration about some of the key points that she has raised, but I am sure that she will recognise that for seven of the months since the act was passed there has been a pandemic, which has resulted in staff who deal with many aspects of taking forward the consultation and developing the guidance and the regulations that need to be brought before the Parliament having to be pivoted away to deal with pandemic-related issues. Some of those staff now have to deal with Brexit preparation issues.

I am sure that Mary Fee recognises that the civil servants who deal with those matters are working as hard as they can to take forward complex legislation that requires a significant amount of secondary legislation, guidance and consultation before the final provisions in the act can be fully implemented. However, she has my assurance that those civil servants are continuing to take forward as much of the work as they can in the present environment and that they will continue to work on the things that they can implement as quickly as possible and take forward the necessary consultation and guidance that needs to be developed in order to support that implementation.

Public Transport (Face Coverings)

4. **Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how successful the roll-out of the wearing of face coverings on public transport has been, and how it is monitoring this. (S5O-04756)

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity (Michael Matheson): Since 22 June, when the mandatory wearing of face coverings came into force in Scotland, uptake has increased considerably

across public transport modes. Transport operators advise that compliance is generally high—it is normally observed to be between 80 and 100 per cent—although there are localised variations. In conjunction with operators, Transport Scotland officials continue to monitor the levels of compliance with legislation. However, the enforcement of the wearing of face coverings on public transport rests with Police Scotland and the British Transport Police.

Bill Kidd: I recently met the British Transport Police at Anniesland train station and observed it actively supporting the health regulations as it demonstrated how passengers without a face covering were calmly approached using the four Es: engage, explain, encourage and enforce. Without exception, the passengers complied with that guidance. I think that the approach is working well.

Michael Matheson: Powers are, of course, in place through legislation for fixed-penalty notices to be issued if necessary. However, Bill Kidd has made a good point. Police Scotland and BTP have an approach in which enforcement is used as a last resort. They encourage passengers to ensure that they are complying with the regulations on wearing a face mask on public transport.

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): Many disabilities and conditions that exempt a person from covering their face are not visible. What support is available to people who are exempt from covering their faces to ensure that they can continue to use public transport confidently and safely?

Michael Matheson: I recognise that there are situations in which people are, for a variety of reasons, unable to wear a face mask. The Government has developed an exemption card, which people can find out more about by accessing the Scottish Government website. If they choose to carry such a card, they can use it at any point if they are questioned about why they are not wearing a face covering.

I recognise that other exemption cards are also available, all of which are valid for people to use. I certainly want to encourage those who cannot wear a face mask to ensure that they carry one of those cards so that it can be presented at any point if people challenge them on why they are not wearing a face mask.

ScotRail (Service Reductions)

6. **John Scott (Ayr) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reports that ScotRail plans to reduce services by 10 per cent next month. (S5O-04758)

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity (Michael Matheson): In line with other train operators, ScotRail has been assessing its actual patronage to match services against current demand, at a time when the number of passengers is around 25 per cent of pre-Covid levels. As with any timetable changes, ScotRail has consulted key stakeholders, including the regional transport partnerships, Transport Focus and the trade unions, to discuss the December changes. The changes will be confirmed by ScotRail in the very near future to give rail users sufficient time to make informed journey planning decisions.

John Scott: How will that 10 per cent cut in services be factored into any future emergency measures agreement budget? What is the status of the on-going discussions with Abellio about a longer-term contractual agreement after the EMA expires in January 2021?

Michael Matheson: The changes as they stand, as proposed by ScotRail, would be accommodated in the existing EMA. Any savings that are derived from that would be accrued to the existing EMA.

The discussions about any future EMA are currently on-going with a view to looking at what the further option may be in the new year. That work is being carried out and detailed discussions about those issues are taking place.

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): Given that peak regulated rail fares on ScotRail services have risen by over 50 per cent under the Scottish National Party, does the cabinet secretary accept that another fare increase will not get people back on our trains? Can he tell us whether the planned 1.6 per cent fare hike will go ahead in January? If he has not decided, when will he? Passengers deserve to know.

Michael Matheson: Those matters are presently being considered as part of the on-going plan and any future plans for the new year. As the member will recognise, the capping that we apply to fare increases in Scotland means that on average, fares in Scotland are 20 per cent below those of train operators across the rest of the United Kingdom. That is part of our commitment to making sure that train travel is as affordable as possible. The member can be assured that the matter is being taken into account as we go into the new year.

Bus Services (Covid-19)

8. **Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has to encourage an increase in the use of bus services following the Covid-19 pandemic. (S5O-04760)

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity (Michael Matheson): Supporting the resurgence of a healthy bus network will be a vital step in the Covid recovery. While physical distancing remains in place, capacity will continue to be restricted. However, we are now looking ahead with our partners towards a fair and green recovery. Tackling the negative impact of road congestion on bus services is key to that. The recently launched bus partnership fund has reaffirmed our commitment to capital investment of over £500 million for bus priority measures to make journeys quicker and more reliable for passengers.

Sarah Boyack: Will the Scottish Government ensure that the funding that it spends now delivers so that routes are not lost due to travel restrictions? Can the cabinet secretary also ensure that investment continues in zero-carbon buses now, to keep jobs in the bus industry and in companies such as Alexander Dennis so that we have bus services for the future that will meet our low-carbon ambitions, and so that companies survive to keep those vital services going?

Michael Matheson: I missed the start of Sarah Boyack's question, but I presume that it is about seeking to provide financial support to the bus industry to maintain bus routes and access to bus services.

That is why we have provided over £162 million to bus services and operators over the course of the pandemic in order to maintain those services. That funding helps to meet the gap that has been created by the loss in patronage due to physical distancing, which has had an impact on the fare box for operators. Alongside that, we have provided access to the concessionary fares programme, which allows companies to draw on funds on the basis of historical concessionary travel funding. Over £200 million has been made available as part of that package to support bus services.

On Sarah Boyack's wider point about supporting the bus industry, the member will be aware of the wide range of work that we have done to support the introduction of zero emission buses through our grant scheme. A recent announcement was made on the award of those grants, and that resulted in 35 buses being ordered from Alexander Dennis. Given that that company is based in my constituency, I am well aware of its expertise and its critical importance to the bus industry and Scotland's manufacturing capability. That is why we have been providing it with support and assistance in developing innovation in new bus technology through Scottish Enterprise, and why we are working with bus operators on whether further financial models could be put in place to encourage the move towards zero emission

buses. That work involves the Scottish National Investment Bank, Alexander Dennis and other bus operators and manufacturers and all are playing their part in developing new financial models that can stimulate the market and generate further orders for companies that are working in the bus manufacturing sector.

Justice and the Law Officers

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Questions 2 and 7 have been grouped together. If a member wishes to request a supplementary question, they should press their request-to-speak button or indicate in the chat function by entering the letter R during the relevant question. I remind all members to be succinct in their questioning, and I ask ministers, as far as possible, to be succinct in their responses.

Reconviction Statistics (2017-18 Cohort)

1. Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the reconviction statistics for the 2017-18 offender cohort. (S5O-04761)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Humza Yousaf): Those latest statistics show that our evidence-based approach to rehabilitation is working. Reconviction levels are at a 21-year low. The average number of reconvictions, which is a measure of how often offenders are reconvicted, saw a reduction of 4 per cent compared with the previous year, and the reconviction rate decreased to 26.3 per cent in the same period. The latest figures are the lowest since comparable records began.

The statistics also demonstrate again that community sentences are more effective than short custodial sentences. That underlines why we were correct to extend the statutory presumption against short prison sentences last year.

Joan McAlpine: The new figures demonstrate clearly the link between the Scottish Government's smart approach to justice, with an emphasis on community sentences, and the prevention of reoffending. What impact will the introduction of a presumption against short sentences have on reoffending?

Humza Yousaf: Joan McAlpine is right in asking her question and making the case that, when we invest in alternatives to custody and follow the evidence and the data, the results will be people who reoffend less and are reconvicted less often. Ultimately, that means that there will be fewer victims of crime, and that is the smart justice approach. We have already seen some of those results through the extension of the presumption. There are more smart justice interventions that I want to bring forward as Cabinet Secretary for

Justice, but whatever we do will always be led by the data and the evidence.

Assaults Against Police Officers (Recording)

2. Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how assaults against police officers are recorded. (S5O-04762)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Humza Yousaf): When the police record those crimes, the vast majority will be classified as common assaults of an emergency worker. Although the information cannot be split into different types of emergency worker, we know that most victims will be police officers.

The legal powers that are used to prosecute people for assaulting an officer will depend on the circumstances of the case. In addition to the common law of assault, that might include offences under section 90 of the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012 and section 1 of the Emergency Workers (Scotland) Act (Scotland) 2005. In 2018-19, over 1,300 people in Scotland had a main conviction for assaulting a police officer or an emergency worker under the 2005 and 2012 acts. There could be additional convictions that do not appear in the data, as they were not considered to be the main charge in a particular case.

Keith Brown: In the past five years, assaults on police officers and staff have increased by over 22 per cent. This year, between April and June alone there were 1,775 reported assaults on officers and staff, which is approximately 20 a day. In my area, police officers have been kicked and punched and have suffered dog bites when carrying out their duties. Does the cabinet secretary agree with me that that is completely unacceptable? Does he agree that no one should be a victim of abuse or violence while at work, not least those who are working so hard to keep our communities safe during these challenging times?

Humza Yousaf: I entirely agree with Keith Brown. It is a disgrace that police officers in particular, who have been at the very front line of keeping us safe during the pandemic, have been the victims of assault. It was disgraceful and unacceptable pre-Covid, and it is even worse in the midst of the pandemic when they are keeping us safe.

I am a supporter of the pledge to tackle assault on police officers that the chief constable has brought forward. I also note that the Lord Advocate has made public comment as the head of prosecution to say that any person who commits such an act will be dealt with robustly by Scotland's prosecution service.

If there is more that the Government can do, I am having constant conversations with the likes of the Scottish Police Federation and Police Scotland, and we will continue to keep the matter under review.

Emergency Workers (Attacks)

7. Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to recent statistics that show attacks on emergency workers have reached a record high. (S5O-04767)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Humza Yousaf): As I said a moment ago, it is a disgrace, and I find it abhorrent, that there is even one attack on one of our emergency workers, including police officers, let alone the numbers that Jamie Greene has quoted.

The legal powers that are used to prosecute people for assaulting an officer will depend on the circumstances of the case. The figures might not show the entire picture because it is the main charge that is recorded, so it might not be apparent in all the relevant data.

I can assure Jamie Greene that I and the Lord Advocate take a zero tolerance approach to those who assault officers or any emergency worker. I am happy to work on a cross-party basis with stakeholders to see whether there is anything further that we can do in this regard.

Jamie Greene: I agree with the cabinet secretary that the situation is unacceptable to anyone, regardless of their politics. We should be alarmed that there were more than 7,500 attacks on emergency workers last year. The important thing to note is that, since 2013, three quarters of those who were convicted of such attacks did not face a jail sentence. I know that the cabinet secretary does not direct the judicial system, but how can we fill our emergency service workers with any confidence that the soft-touch approach to conviction levels will give them the protection that they need and that they deserve from the Government?

Humza Yousaf: Jamie Greene and I share disgust and abhorrence at attacks on emergency workers. For all our differences in politics and in our approach to justice, this is certainly not one of them.

Jamie Greene is also correct to say that I do not direct judicial decisions; that is ultimately a matter for sheriffs and judges. However, I reiterate the very public commentary from the Lord Advocate, as head of prosecutions, that the prosecution service takes a robust approach to such offenders. If there is anything further in law that we can do, then, as Cabinet Secretary for Justice and as a member of the Scottish Government, I am open to

having conversations about them. However, we should not have to rely on the deterrent effect of a jail sentence for people not to commit these crimes and assaults against police officers. We should be making it abundantly clear, through things such as the chief constable's pledge, and through a concerted message from everybody, regardless of their political persuasion, that these attacks are completely unacceptable.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): Last week, I asked whether the justice secretary thought that there could be a link between Scottish National Party cuts to front-line officer numbers and the rising number of officer absences due to mental ill-health. Given that the assaults on police officers that Keith Brown rightly brought up earlier have risen from 898 in 2015-16 to more than 2,000 in 2019-20, does the cabinet secretary accept that that rise in the number of assaults and the cuts to front-line numbers could have contributed to mental ill-health absences? If so, what will he do to address it?

Humza Yousaf: I am astounded that Liam Kerr has managed to spin the additional 1,000 officers that we have brought in since 2007 as a cut to the number of police officers. Of course, it is for the chief constable to determine what number of police officers are at the divisional level, the regional level or the national level. If Liam Kerr thinks that he is better able to determine who should be at the divisional, regional or national level, he should pick up the phone and tell the chief constable. That is very much an operational matter.

There are 1,000 additional officers. There is, of course, a rising budget; the Conservatives asked for an additional £50 million for police officers. We gave £60 million and the Conservatives, of course, voted against that budget. We have rolled out mobile phones for police officers, and we have made a range of other investments that I hope will help.

Ultimately, the health and wellbeing of police officers is an issue of paramount importance to us. As I said, I have engaged with Police Scotland, the Scottish Police Federation and many other stakeholders to see what more we can do. We are in the middle of budget negotiations and, if there are further discussions that we can have on investing in measures that will help police officers' mental health, the police service will certainly get an open ear from me.

Court Proceedings (Impact of Postponement on Mental Health)

3. Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what consideration it has given to the impact of the repeated postponement of court proceedings on the mental

health of alleged victims, particularly of sexual crimes. (S5O-04763)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Humza Yousaf): The current pandemic has impacted our criminal justice system and others throughout the world in way that has, frankly, never been seen before. Our priority is to ensure that our system can operate as effectively as possible, but it has to be person centred—victim centred—while balancing the rights of the accused to ensure a fair justice system for all.

I recognise the impact that the delays and uncertainty that Brian Whittle mentioned in his question can have on victims' mental—and, indeed, physical—health. Before the pandemic I raised that matter with the Lord President and we are continuing those discussions in light of the significant progress that is required to tackle the backlog. It is one of the main drivers behind innovative solutions such as remote jury centres and the reason why we have invested £12 million of additional funding for the creation of those centres for High Court and sheriff and jury trials.

There has been positive progress on the number of High Court trials that we are running and the capacity that we have. Good progress is also being made on sheriff and jury trials. We have invested an additional £4.25 million in front-line services to respond to an increase in demand during the pandemic. That has increased the capacity of vital programmes such as Rape Crisis Scotland's national advocacy project, which provides a key support worker in every centre in Scotland.

Brian Whittle: The cabinet secretary knows that my interest in the topic comes from working with a constituent who is going through exactly this issue. She has had her court proceedings postponed twice with no notice and no support, which has compounded the trauma that she was already suffering, and it transpires that that is a common occurrence. Is the cabinet secretary aware of the issue and the fact that, with many people suffering post-traumatic stress disorder, the practice may have a human rights element? Will he meet me to discuss the issue further?

Humza Yousaf: I will be more than happy to meet Brian Whittle at the earliest opportunity. He will know from conversations that he and I have had that I have met a range of survivors of sexual offences and rape. It is fair to say that the trauma of going through a court process is challenging for them. It was challenging pre-Covid, let alone now when there are delays because we have not had jury trials for more than seven months and are working through the backlog.

I recognise everything that Brian Whittle is saying and I am happy to meet him to discuss the

issue further. The best thing that we can do is to ensure that the court processes are back up and running, and we are investing in that happening. We hope that that will help to mitigate some of the very difficult challenges and trauma that victims and alleged victims are facing.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Victims of human trafficking are traumatised by their experience, and it is not surprising that many foreign nationals choose to return home. Delays to justice could mean that they are less likely to return to give evidence. What steps are being taken to capture their evidence in order that traffickers are held to account without causing further distress to their victims?

Humza Yousaf: Rhoda Grant has raised a hugely important issue, which came up in conversation this morning when the Lord Advocate and I met Scottish Women's Aid, Rape Crisis Scotland and Victim Support Scotland. We are investing significant amounts of money, time and effort in getting evidence by commission and video recording. The pandemic has had an effect and impact on that and we are already looking to see where we can work with third sector partners—for example, using their premises for video recording and taking evidence by commission. We hope that that investment, effort and energy will help us to get evidence from victims early in the process and deal with the trauma and re-traumatising that they might experience from potential court delays. If Rhoda Grant ever wants a conversation around the efforts that we are putting into tackling human trafficking, my door is open.

Drug Offences (Glasgow)

4. **Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how many people have been charged with drug offences across Glasgow in the last year. (S5O-04764)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Humza Yousaf): The most recent available data from the Scottish Government's criminal proceedings national statistics show that, in 2018-19, 1,253 people were proceeded against in Glasgow sheriff or justice of the peace court with a main charge of a drug crime or offence, and 1,102 of them were convicted.

Over the past decade, the number of people proceeded against in Glasgow sheriff or JP court for drug crimes or offences has decreased by 35 per cent. That is identical to the decrease that has been seen nationally over the same period.

Although the role of enforcement is clear in respect of the need to stop the supply of illegal drugs, the Scottish Government has been very clear that we need to take a public health

approach to the use of substances and the treatment of substance abuse.

Sandra White: I thank the cabinet secretary for that reply—my supplementary is on the public health issue, although it is also a justice issue.

The cabinet secretary will be aware of the recent arrest and charging of Peter Krykant, who has been operating a drug consumption van in Glasgow to help reduce the health risks that are associated with problem drug use.

Can the cabinet secretary provide any update on discussions with the United Kingdom Government regarding drug consumption rooms, and say whether the Scottish Government's request for powers to enable it to operate such rooms has progressed in any way at all?

Humza Yousaf: I am aware of the case. On a point of clarification—although I am happy to be corrected if I am wrong—Mr Krykant was not arrested but charged in relation to an obstruction while police officers were carrying out their duties under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971.

That was really unfortunate, and I strongly believe that Mr Krykant, who has been an activist on these issues for many years, should not be put in a position in which he feels that he has to break the law in order to help some of the most vulnerable people in Scottish communities to stay alive.

The Scottish Government takes a public health approach on the issue. We absolutely believe in overdose prevention facilities, and we believe that they should be regulated. We—not just the Scottish Government, but many Scottish MPs in Westminster—have made that case, which I strongly support. I call again on the UK Government either to change the 1971 act so that we can have overdose prevention facilities in Scotland—again, I stress, in a regulated manner—or, if it will not do so, to devolve the power to Scotland so that we can make the change in order to bring forward those facilities.

Those conversations continue. Joe FitzPatrick and I recently had a conversation with Kit Malthouse that touched on the issue, and we will continue to make representations. As I said, people, including activists such as Mr Krykant, should not be put in a position in which they feel that their only option is to break the law.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind all members to always be aware of the issue—or potential issue—of sub judice when they are discussing matters in the chamber.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): The cabinet secretary will be aware that the Scottish Government can do more under its existing powers. For example, the Lord Advocate's

guidance directly impacts on how police respond to arrangements such as the mobile safe consumption room that Peter Krykant set up in Glasgow. Between Mr Krykant's efforts and the actions of the police, which does the cabinet secretary believe do more to enhance public safety?

Humza Yousaf: It is not an either/or. The police have a role to play. If Mr McArthur has looked at the news today, he may have seen that Police Scotland is piloting the carrying of naloxone by a number of its officers. That is a positive development and will undoubtedly save lives.

When I talk to the police, they tell me that they want to take a public health approach. Of course, where it is necessary, they will take an enforcement approach, especially to those who blight our communities through the supply of drugs.

The point about guidance, to which Mr McArthur referred, is for the Lord Advocate, and he can discuss prosecution with the Lord Advocate. However, that is not to let anybody in the UK Government off the hook—the only way that we will have overdose prevention facilities that are safe and regulated will be through a change in the law.

Trying to make changes around the fringes or asking the Lord Advocate to provide some sort of immunity or to review prosecution policy does not deal with the fundamental issue. If we believe in overdose prevention facilities as part of a suite of measures to help with substance abuse issues—as the Scottish Government does—there has to be a change in the law.

Police Strength Statistics

5. Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the latest police strength statistics. (S5O-04765)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Humza Yousaf): I am incredibly grateful for the hard work of all our police officers throughout the pandemic, and for the professionalism that they have shown in keeping us safe.

Police officer numbers in Scotland remain significantly above the level that was inherited in 2007, and recruitment into Police Scotland continues to be strong.

The recruitment of police officers is, of course, a matter for the chief constable. As of 30 September 2020, there were 17,249 police officers in Scotland, which is an increase of 1,015 since 2007. Officer numbers in Scotland continue to compare favourably with those in England and Wales. The latest figures show that, as of 31

March, there were around 32 officers per 10,000 people in Scotland, compared with around 21 per 10,000 in England and Wales.

Graham Simpson: As the cabinet secretary will be aware, the latest figures show that, since 2013, 656 divisional officers have been lost from the front line, and violent crime is now at an eight-year high. There are 258 fewer officers than there were last year. Will he guarantee that there will be no further cuts to the number of divisional officers—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Humza—

Graham Simpson: —in this parliamentary session?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Excuse me for butting in on your dramatic pause, Mr Simpson.

Humza Yousaf: I have to go back to my answer to Mr Simpson's colleague, Liam Kerr. There has been an increase of more than 1,000 officers. It is up to the chief constable to decide, operationally, what officers and how many officers are in which divisions, how many officers there are at a regional level and how many officers there are at a national level. If Graham Simpson thinks that he could do a better job of it than the chief constable, he should pick up the phone to the chief constable—I am sure that he will make himself available to Graham Simpson and listen to his argument.

There has not been a cut in officer numbers. In England and Wales, there has been a cut of more than 13,000 over the same period, whereas we have increased the number of officers here. I can point to a range of other comparisons between policing in Scotland and policing in England and Wales, and we compare favourably on every single measure.

It is important that Graham Simpson understands not only that we have additional police officers, but that the efforts of officers who are based nationally can very much help locally. For example, the force reserve, which can be deployed right across the country whenever circumstances require, was recently deployed in East Kilbride—a place in which Graham Simpson has an interest—when there was a high-profile murder. We should not think that, just because officers are deployed nationally, there is not a local benefit to that—there very much is.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that I now only have time for a short supplementary from Kenneth Gibson.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Can the cabinet secretary advise the Parliament what the increase or decrease in police numbers has been in Ayrshire since 2007? If we had enacted the same policies as those pursued south of the border, where Mr Simpson's party has

now been in office for more than a decade, how many officers would Ayrshire be likely to have now?

Humza Yousaf: Forgive me—I do not have the figures for Ayrshire right at hand. However, Mr Gibson is right to say that there has been an increase in the number of police officers from the number that we inherited in 2007.

Not only has there been an increase in officer numbers in Scotland since 2007 in comparison with a decrease in England and Wales, but it is fair to say that we treat our police officers better in Scotland.

In Scotland, the starting pay for a police officer is £26,000, whereas in some forces in England and Wales, the level is as low as £18,900. In Scotland, police officers had a 6.5 per cent pay increase, which was described as the best pay deal in two decades, whereas officers in England and Wales received a pay offer of 2 per cent in 2018, which was described as a punch in the nose for every single police officer.

I am happy to stand on our record of policing in Scotland, and I suspect that those on the Conservative benches would not be so proud of their colleagues' record in England and Wales.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions. I apologise to Willie Coffey and Rachael Hamilton, whose questions I was unable to reach.

Safe Schools

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Lewis Macdonald): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-23385, in the name of Ross Greer, on safe schools.

14:51

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): I know that I speak on behalf of us all when I say thank you to every teacher, member of school staff, pupil, parent and carer for their efforts over the past eight months. Our young people's education has unquestionably been damaged, but disruptions and closures have far wider impacts on mental health and social development and, for some, the loss of the stability and security of school has been a direct risk to their health and wellbeing.

The decisions that are made here cannot be binary choices between total closure and just pretending that schools can go back to normal. Everyone in our schools—staff and pupils—deserves a safe environment. The Greens have brought the proposals in the motion to Parliament today because that is simply not the case across Scotland.

It is clear that schools are struggling. Several have had to partially close already in the past week, such as Aboyne primary school and Milne's high school. Although I do not believe that a significant gulf exists between the Government and Opposition parties on the issues, I have to be blunt with the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills and say that the descriptions that he and other ministers have given in recent days of life in our schools just do not match the reality that hundreds of teachers describe.

I raise with genuine regret the specific issue with which I start. I can no longer totally believe the official statistics on self-isolation and transmission in our schools. I do not say that lightly; I say it based on what school staff have told me. Multiple teachers have described how senior managers prevented them from fully listing the number of their pupils who were considered close contacts, because the school wanted to keep self-isolation numbers low. In one case, a teacher who tested positive followed the guidance, listed their whole primary class as close contacts and was then told that they could pick no more than a third of the children in the class.

In other cases, teachers were not consulted at all when one of their pupils tested positive, and were unable to identify either themselves or other pupils as close contacts. A number of teachers reported that pupils who were not asked to isolate

subsequently became ill. One teacher told me that the pupils at their school, who were identified as close contacts in the morning, were told to attend class for the rest of the day and not to tell their teachers that they had been confirmed as close contacts.

Some cases appear to be due to rigid systems of decisions around close contacts, based on limited information such as fixed seating plans. In other cases, schools fear parental backlash if they ask large numbers of pupils to isolate or if they do so in the middle of the day, when a parent would need to collect them.

In a number of instances, staff should isolate but have been prevented from doing so because the school is worried about staffing pressures. A consistent theme on track and trace was that of teachers who felt that they, or the school, were doing it alone—without support from, or connection to, local public health teams and the wider track and trace system.

I am not here to tell the education secretary why that is the case, but I tell him that it is happening. I urge the Government to urgently review whether track and trace is working in schools, and to do so by speaking directly to the overworked teachers who have to take on the role of public health officials, on top of delivering in-person and remote learning.

If councils and school management are telling Mr Swinney that the system is working, I must urge him to hear the reality from the front lines. Across the country, more than 2,500 school staff are off due to Covid, alongside roughly 26,000 pupils; however, from what I have been told, that is an undercount. Pupils and staff who should be isolating are not doing so, which is driving transmission. In at least one case, teachers have told me of their school marking some self-isolating pupils as being absent for other reasons. Although I do not understand why, it is happening, and the correspondence that I am getting is too widespread and too consistent to write off as being about isolated incidents.

We are all aware that teachers in a number of areas were told to switch off the protect Scotland app, even when their phone was with them all day. Multiple members of staff have reported to me that they have even been told to ignore notifications from the app to self-isolate if they think that they were sufficiently protected. Given that the app does not tell people who they came into close contact with, that is a frankly dangerous suggestion. I urge the Government to review every council's guidance. In at least one case, that guidance suggests that staff do not need to self-isolate if they were wearing a mask while in close contact with a positive case. I can find nothing in the Scottish Government's guidance or clinical

advice to support that, and the equivalent guidance in England suggests—correctly—the opposite.

The motion calls for urgent action to protect vulnerable teachers in particular. I am aware that at least 1,000 teachers have had requests to work from home rejected in recent weeks. Following the education secretary's invitation, I have raised the cases of two constituents with him in the past couple of days. It is clear that a number of councils are insisting that extremely vulnerable teachers and other staff continue to teach in classrooms or to use up their sick leave entitlement.

I have been contacted by teachers with vastly reduced lung capacity due to conditions such as cystic fibrosis, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, heart conditions, and severe asthma. They were all previously shielding and all of their general practitioners recommended that they work from home, as do specialists, occupational health officials and others. Every one of their requests to do so was rejected. Those teachers are terrified—with justification—that going to work right now could kill them. In an increasing number of cases, the behaviour of their employers has escalated to bullying, and unions are now involved.

The Government must act to ensure that clinically vulnerable staff are supported. That means ensuring that they can work from home or in a safer alternative environment; where that is not possible, they should be supported to go on leave without loss of income. I urge the education secretary to immediately clarify the guidance for previously shielding staff in level 4 areas. The First Minister announced yesterday that shielding pupils should not attend school in person in those areas, but a number of staff immediately got in touch with me as a result of that to ask about the circumstances for them.

Some councils have been quite open about the reason why they are preventing staff from working from home or self-isolating: there are not enough other staff available to keep schools open. Not only is that grossly irresponsible towards those who are clinically vulnerable—who, frankly, feel that it has been decided that they are expendable—it is short sighted and dangerous when it simply leads to infectious individuals staying in school and transmitting the virus.

The Educational Institute for Scotland wrote to the First Minister over the summer, calling for 3,500 additional teachers to reduce class sizes and increase social distancing. Around 1,400 posts were funded and recruited; the motion therefore calls for an additional 2,000 teachers to be urgently recruited. Given the current staff absence rates, which is before flu season begins, additional staff will be critical to simply keeping schools open, never mind reducing class sizes.

The final proposal in the motion is for regular testing to be available to all staff and senior pupils. At present, it is not available to asymptomatic pupils, and staff must actively seek it out. That simply is not delivering the scale of testing that we know, from international evidence, can be effective.

Vulnerable teachers and support staff across the country are watching this debate, expecting that Parliament will step up to protect them this winter. I hope that colleagues will agree that, between the motion and the Opposition amendments, we are able to do so.

I move,

That the Parliament believes that education is best delivered in the classroom, but that making schools safe for pupils, teachers and staff must be a top priority of government during the pandemic; notes that, as of 10 November 2020, 29,486 pupils and 2,615 staff were absent from Scottish schools for COVID-19-related reasons, with absence rates affecting areas with higher levels of deprivation more; expresses concern regarding reports that some school staff have been instructed to turn off the Protect Scotland app when in school and may have felt under pressure to continue to attend schools even when notified by the app of a potential exposure risk; considers it unacceptable that some clinically vulnerable teachers have felt pressured to return to in-person teaching against specific advice from their GPs to the contrary and in the absence of an overall national strategy on how to deal with school staff with chronic or underlying health conditions; calls on the Scottish Government to work with local authorities to ensure that any vulnerable school staff member who is medically unable to attend school in person without being placed at unacceptable risk is better supported to either work from home or in a safer alternative setting, or, if this is not possible, to potentially be placed on leave without loss of income; expresses disappointment in government efforts to adequately prepare resource levels for COVID-19-related staff absences; calls on the Scottish Government to deliver funding for the purpose of recruiting at least an additional 2,000 full-time teachers to ensure that all schools can maintain safe staffing levels while managing absences due to COVID-19, and further calls on the Scottish Government to make regular voluntary COVID-19 testing widely available for asymptomatic staff and senior pupils across all of Scotland's schools.

14:59

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (John Swinney): I welcome the debate. I wholeheartedly agree with the point in the motion that

“education is best delivered in the classroom”.

I also agree that keeping our schools safe for pupils, teachers and staff must remain a central priority for us all. Ensuring that has been the key consideration in the work of the education recovery group, which has drawn together Government, local authorities, professional associations, parents groups and education advisers. The original guidance in August, supplemented by further measures, was designed

to ensure that we do all that we can to keep schools safe. I confirm to Parliament my clear commitment to continue with that approach.

One of my priorities has been to ensure that high-quality information is available to inform debate and provide assurance to all concerned. Today, the advisory sub-group on education and children's issues published an updated evidence paper on many questions in relation to school safety and the prevalence of the virus in schools. Public Health Scotland has published new summary statistics that provide extensive detail on the issue.

The evidence shows no difference between the positivity rates of pre-school, primary and secondary school teachers and staff relative to other worker groups of a similar age. I hope that that finding provides reassurance that, with the right protective measures in place—as required in the guidance that was set out in August and updated in October—schools are safe places to be for children and staff.

In addressing the risks of children and young people being in school, the reports make clear that children and younger people are much less susceptible to severe clinical disease arising from coronavirus, that there is no direct evidence that transmission in schools plays a significant contributory role in rates of infection among children and that time out of school has a detrimental effect, particularly on vulnerable children. The evidence weighs clearly in favour of children attending school whenever it is safe to do so, which is why the Government has made that a priority.

Ross Greer: On the cabinet secretary's point about data suggesting that there is no significant transmission between pupils in schools, will he respond to the issues that I raised about schools not reporting? There is a potential undercount, because schools are instructing teachers not to identify pupils as close contacts of those who have tested positive. Some pupils are falling ill as a result of that.

John Swinney: The point that I was making was about the evidence that has emerged from the PCR—polymerase chain reaction—testing that is undertaken on children. It is indisputable evidence in relation to the way in which the testing regime operates and what it indicates about the prevalence of Covid among children and, as a consequence, the transmissibility of Covid to other children in a school context.

Pupil attendance data shows that just 1.2 per cent of the total number of absences are due to Covid-19-related sickness, which represents just 0.1 per cent of all pupils. The rate of Covid-related sickness among pupils is low around the country,

including in the 11 local authorities that will move into level 4 on Friday. That data, alongside the fact that the proportion of positive test cases from people aged over 18 who reported an occupation in education and childcare has remained largely constant since late August, helps to demonstrate why it remains safe to keep schools open in level 4 areas, except where public health advice that is relevant to a specific school dictates otherwise, as is the current provision in law.

The rise in the overall number of Covid-related absences has been substantially driven by pupils who are isolating, which demonstrates that caution is being applied with regard to the self-isolation requirements for schools.

My amendment explicitly recognises—it is important that Parliament explicitly supports this and puts it on the record—the extraordinary efforts that councils and school staff are making to keep schools safe. I do not for a moment underestimate the challenge that that represents for individual schools and school leaders. Indeed, this morning, I spoke to school leaders around the country about that very question.

I take the opportunity to once again place on record my deep gratitude—it is implicit in my amendment—for the dedication that has been shown by school leaders, teachers and school support staff over the past few months, because they have rescued many children in our country who are better served by being in school rather than not.

Our updated school guidance was published on 30 October. It sets out detailed guidance on most of the issues that were covered by Ross Greer's motion, including on clinically vulnerable staff, making it clear that councils should take clinical advice fully into account when agreeing appropriate mitigations with employees and whether it is appropriate for employees to remain in school.

On testing, we have already put in place arrangements to allow members of school staff who are concerned to get a test whether or not they have symptoms. In line with my amendment, we will make plans, in the near term, informed by clinical advice, to build on that. That will potentially include piloting and rolling out in-school rapid testing of staff. We will bring more detail on those plans to Parliament in the coming weeks, and the health secretary will make a statement to Parliament on that question.

Our guidance is backed by an investment of £135 million for local authorities, which includes £80 million for additional staff. Councils have already recruited 1,250 additional teachers and 155 support staff, with an estimated 200 further teachers and 100 support staff in the pipeline.

That is, of course, in addition to the normal capability of local authorities to recruit supply staff to provide any replacement cover that is required.

We cannot look at schools in isolation from the rest of society. The approach that we set out in our strategic framework is designed to drive down overall virus levels. In effect, we are asking wider Scottish society to shoulder a greater burden of restrictions so that we can prioritise Scotland's children and keep our schools open. That is the choice that we have made.

However, none of that discounts the understandable anxiety that is felt by school staff. Where there is a need to take further action, either by updating our guidance or ensuring that it is being given practical effect, we will work with partners to do so. We want schools to be safe, and we want teachers and staff to feel safe. I am committed to achieving both.

I move amendment S5M-23385.3, to leave out from second "expresses" to end and insert:

"commends the work of local government and the Scottish Government in the recruitment of an additional 1,250 teachers and 155 support staff, with an estimated 200 further teachers and 100 support staff in the pipeline; further commends COSLA and the Scottish Government for continuing to work in partnership to ensure sufficient teaching and support staff in schools; recognises the Scottish Government's commitment to provide an additional £155 million for the COVID response in school education while awaiting the outcome of a COSLA-led exercise on additional costs incurred by local authorities in relation to school safety; notes that testing is available for asymptomatic teachers who have concerns, and commits to exploring how to expand testing further for teachers and other school staff; expresses its gratitude to teachers and other school staff for the professionalism and dedication they have shown to keep schools open safely, and thereby continuing to protect the development, wellbeing and educational progress of children and young people; welcomes the Health and Safety Executive's very positive feedback about the work done by school staff to implement the school safety guidance, following a programme of independent spot-checks and inspections, and further welcomes the findings of the Connect parent/carer 'back at school survey' where 70% of respondents feel school is going well for their child."

15:06

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): I thank Ross Greer for using his party's time for this debate. We disagree on many things, but on education we share a passion to get it right for every child—indeed, not only for every child but for every teacher, too.

The issue of keeping schools open is one of the most challenging conundrums that all Governments face. It is also one of the most divisive. On one side are those who advocate complete closure and blanket online learning, and on the other are those who demand that schools stay open at all costs.

The opening line of the motion sums up this debate perfectly. It says that the best place for learning is in the classroom but that those classrooms must be safe for everyone.

Teachers and school staff have truly risen to the challenge in doing what they love most: teaching, and doing so face-to-face where possible. However, eight months into this pandemic, the very fact that teachers are talking about strikes should ring loud alarm bells.

My views on school strikes are no secret—I think that they are unnecessary, damaging for pupils and should be ruled out. However, too often teachers' concerns have been ignored.

If it is true that teachers have been encouraged to turn off the Protect Scotland app or asked to come to school against explicit medical advice, that is simply not on. One teacher told me yesterday that pupils in her class were repeatedly allowed to continue classes until the end of the day despite being contacted by trace and protect. That is not on, either.

The Government has a duty to step up and make schools safe. It is not good enough to say that that is only the responsibility of local councils, because they have used up attainment funding to make schools safe—which begs the question how they can now properly tackle attainment.

The Government's amendment typifies its intransigent approach to any form of critique. It implies that criticism of the Government is somehow criticism of those on the front line. That could not be further from the truth, which is why I support the motion and all the Opposition amendments. The Government's disappointing attempt to delete the bulk of our concerns is a tell-tale sign of its now default position: entrenched defence. It is not ready to listen or act.

Yes, more teachers are welcome, but we called for at least 3,000 new teachers to alleviate the stresses and strains in the classroom. We also called for a national tutoring scheme, similar to the ones in other parts of the UK. We did not call for that for the sake of it, but because so many have fallen so far behind, despite the best efforts of parents and teachers. There are people out there who can and will help.

We also called for greater infrastructure to bridge the digital divide and ensure that no pupil is left behind. The percentage of pupils off school for Covid-related reasons in our most deprived areas is double that in our least deprived areas. Why is that, and what will be done about it? Figures also show that the number of pupils absent from school for more than half the time has increased by nearly a fifth in just two years. That was before Covid. Not only are those pupils absent from school, they are absent from learning.

“Getting it right for every child” means absolutely nothing if there are young people sitting at home, sharing a laptop with their siblings or parents and not engaging fully in the learning process. Lindsay Paterson described the online and home learning provision in some parts of this country as “depressing”. That is an understatement. It is not the word that I would necessarily use, but he is right in that we find that provision has been variable and, for some, non-existent, depending on who we ask. The inability to learn online will not just exacerbate social divisions; it will do absolutely nothing to help us to reach that holy grail of education—closing the attainment gap.

I have only a short time, and I must close. If some teachers feel under pressure to go to work when they have serious underlying health conditions, we need more teachers. It is as simple as that. We knew that months ago. Where is the army of newly and recently qualified teachers and classroom assistants and retired teachers? How many were contacted? How many are on stand-by to backfill absences? I suspect that the answer is not enough. The Government needs to get its head out of the sand. Let us keep our schools open but keep them safe.

I move amendment S5M-23385.2, to insert at end:

“; notes that participation rates in online learning during the pandemic have been variable across the country, with some pupils and teachers left without access to adequate digital infrastructure or devices to fully facilitate online learning; further notes that, in the absence of nationally co-ordinated online learning materials to support the curriculum, many young people in Scotland missed out on valuable education despite the best efforts and endeavours of their parents and teachers, and calls on the Scottish Government and its agencies to ensure that no child is left behind if required to study from home.”

15:10

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): I support the motion and I associate myself with the remarks of Ross Greer and the Deputy First Minister, in particular, about the efforts of local authorities, teachers and pupils over recent months.

Yesterday, the First Minister made two things very clear. First, she is willing to impose severe restrictions on life in general, to reduce levels of infection. Secondly, she is determined to keep schools open, even in those circumstances. She was at pains to say that those were difficult decisions for her, but she has to understand that they are difficult decisions for the public to accept and understand, too.

No one wants to see young people’s education interrupted again as it was earlier this year. Indeed, the motion accepts the objective of keeping schools open. However, people see that

many young people’s schooling is being disrupted by periods—sometimes consecutive—of self-isolation and the absence of teaching staff. They hear the Deputy First Minister say that there is little infection in schools and that a teacher has no more chance of becoming infected than anyone else in the community has, but they find that hard to believe.

Today’s evidence paper, to which the Deputy First Minister referred, is very much a step in the right direction, in sharing the evidence that underpins those assertions, but such sharing must happen more regularly and transparently and not just occasionally when a parliamentary debate demands it.

John Swinney: I want to make explicit that the papers were prepared to inform the debate and not because the debate was happening; the statistics were pre-scheduled to be issued.

Iain Gray: I take that point and accept it absolutely. However, concerns about whether schools should remain open are not new and it would have been helpful if the statistics had been issued earlier.

Every possible mitigation must be put in place to make our schools as safe as possible. We were promised smaller class sizes and additional cleaning, but the evidence is that class sizes have not changed, and although additional teachers have been recruited, unions and local authorities have made clear that not enough have been recruited to reduce class sizes or support the blended learning that is required for pupils who are self-isolating.

For example, as far as we know, none of the retired teachers who responded to the General Teaching Council for Scotland to say that they were willing to step up has been asked to do so. Similarly, we need all councils—not just some—to employ additional cleaning staff, and not just extend the hours of existing staff, to provide the additional cleaning that is required.

We also need to look to other countries for examples of what we could do. In Germany, the Government is investing €500 million in enhanced ventilation in public buildings, including schools. It cannot be right that all we can do is suggest that windows be kept open in the middle of a Scottish winter.

There can be no compromise on the measures that we have in place. Teachers should not be told that they should turn off the test and trace app that everyone else is encouraged to use, and teachers who should be shielding should be supported and encouraged to work from home and not pressured into going into school.

Promises on routine regular asymptomatic testing must be delivered now—not just promised, caveated or piloted but universally implemented now, eight months into the pandemic. That should be the foundation of teachers' confidence in their safety as they go about their critical work. The desirability of keeping schools open is not being debated here, but what is being debated is that the Government has to do much better, and can do much better, on transparency, mitigation, resources and, critically, on testing to make it possible to keep the schools open.

I move amendment S5M-23385.1, to insert at end:

“, as well as investigating the possibility of resourcing improvements to ventilation in the school estate and producing a report based on Test and Protect that examines infection patterns within school settings.”

15:15

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): I, too, echo what others have said about the hard work of teachers, pupils and local authorities in the recent challenging months. I am pleased that safe schools has been chosen as the subject of debate today; as Ross Greer knows, I have been calling for these issues to be addressed for some time.

There are many difficult realities in the pandemic, and none of this is easy. Many plans have had to change and there are risks in the world that did not exist a year ago—risks that people need to be shielded from. I have been astonished at the blunt dismissal that some teachers have received in response to legitimate and serious safety concerns. It is welcome that schools have been open since August; school is so important for young people's long-term wellbeing and nobody wants to see schools' doors shut again. Some young people have already faced repeated periods of self-isolation, and it is entirely possible that they will face more as the academic year goes on, which will impact their ability to develop their learning and cover the coursework needed for exams. That must be at the forefront of Government thinking.

Although schools are open, it is essential that teachers and school support staff are treated with the dignity and respect that they deserve. Forcing vulnerable teachers to expose themselves and their families to needless danger simply because their roles are normally on the front line is not an acceptable policy in any circumstance. One teacher shared with me the response that she received from her local authority:

“Teaching is a front-line role. We need teachers to lead learning with children. We are not able to provide full-time teaching roles from home.”

What, then, should a teacher who is concerned about their health do? Should they suck it up, stay at home without pay or, worse still, find another career altogether? That is not good enough; nobody should have to choose between their health security and their job security. This is all the more frustrating because I and others have been sounding the alarm about it for months.

In October, I wrote to the cabinet secretary to ask for improvements to be made. I suggested that he import the framework that is used in Denmark, where schools have to follow doctors' orders on working arrangements. I am grateful to Ross Greer for including that in his motion and I look forward to hearing what the cabinet secretary has to say about that option, as I have yet to receive a response to my letter. Statistics show that, since then, risk levels have gone up, but, at the same time, teachers' trust in the Government's handling of the issue has gone down. I am not the only one who has been asking the cabinet secretary to address that. Tes reported that a group of 300 clinically vulnerable teachers wrote to the education recovery group to ask for

“clearer and consistent guidelines across all regions.”

They wrote:

“In some cases, medical advice to remain working from home has been overruled by HR/headteachers, whilst in other regions, working from home agreements have been reached. Why is there not a consistent approach offered to all staff? Why would medical recommendations be overruled by non-medically qualified people?”

I hope that the cabinet secretary will answer those questions today, because fair treatment needs to be Scotland wide. Since August, many teachers have felt that they are expected to just get on with it; they have been telling the Government that the guidance does not reflect the realities of teaching. The cabinet secretary needs to listen to what teachers are telling him.

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

15:19

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): Like many members, I represent constituents who will be moved into level 4 restrictions from Friday. The prevalence of Covid in Glasgow remains, as the First Minister said, stubbornly high, and that is having an impact on our schools as well as on the wider community. School absences—of staff and of pupils—are widespread. Last week, hundreds of children were absent due to Covid in one Glasgow secondary school, and most schools in the city have now been affected by positive cases. Children's learning is, inevitably, being disrupted, and many teachers and support staff have well-founded concerns about their own safety, as well

as that of the wider community. It is right that we listen to them.

I have heard those concerns from teachers across Glasgow and beyond. They have reported pupils being told to attend school while awaiting test results and they have reported inconsistent approaches to other essential safety and hygiene measures. Further, when it comes to social distancing, every constituent who has contacted me about school safety has said quite simply that it is impossible to socially distance in school classrooms and schools, irrespective of pupil age.

Medically at-risk teachers, such as those who were previously shielding, have an even greater sense of fear for their health. They are committed to their jobs, and many of them are highly experienced teachers, but their safety must not simply be set aside. Despite repeated calls for local authorities to allow home working or safer alternative working arrangements, the director of education at Glasgow City Council maintains that it is not possible to undertake the role of teacher at home. One medically at-risk teacher wrote to me to explain how they provided their local authority with an occupational health report, two consultant letters and evidence from their GP saying that they should work from home but that that request was refused on the basis that teachers should not be working from home. Another constituent, who was previously shielding, said:

“I have repeatedly been told that my only option is to ‘go on the sick’. However, as I just completed my probation year with GCC, I am not entitled to sick pay. My options are therefore to continue working and risking my life or apply for benefits. I am a trained teacher, who is capable of working.”

Members of the Educational Institute of Scotland in Glasgow are now having to consider taking collective grievances to address their health and safety concerns for pregnant and vulnerable staff. That is a situation that everybody, including the cabinet secretary, should find unacceptable.

There are, clearly, questions that Glasgow City Council and other local authorities need to address but, right now, they are acting in a vacuum, given the absence of a clear, consistent national strategy from the Government on this issue. Everybody wants to keep schools open, but the precondition for that is to keep them safe, and, for that to happen, the Scottish Government must provide better guidance and more resources. I hope that that is the clear direction that will be given by the Parliament today.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I apologise for the fact that we were not able to see Patrick Harvie, although we certainly heard him.

15:22

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I thank Ross Greer for securing the debate and I echo his and other members’ praise for the efforts of our teachers and our school communities at this time. It is, indeed, a deeply worrying situation for us all. Like Patrick Harvie, my area is going into level 4, and I have numerous pieces of correspondence from people with concerns around that.

However, I have some issues with the way in which things are being presented today. The education recovery group is not just the Government; it is the Government in co-operation with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the unions. They came up with guidance, agreed by all, in order that our schools could open up—and open up fully, as was required. However, the implementation of that guidance and what happens in terms of the relations with the teachers is a matter for the employer, which is the local authority. If there are breaches such as those that have been described in the chamber this afternoon, we have to say that the guidelines are not being followed to the letter, as they were intended to be followed, because the information is there to allow our schools to operate and continue to be a safe environment for our pupils and their teachers.

We have been discussing the issue for a long time—I remember blended learning being discussed before the schools re-opened. At that point, the Conservatives’ position was all about the parents’ wishes and the demands to get the schools open. The Government’s plans were discounted as a “screeching U-turn”, but we did what was expected at the time to get the schools open and to have face-to-face education going on, wherever possible.

I must take issue with the idea that being absent from school means being absent from education. There has been great investment in digital learning, and funds have been provided to local authorities. However, it is down to leadership in individual schools, and the local authorities, to make sure that pupils have access to those digital learning opportunities.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Will Clare Adamson take an intervention?

Clare Adamson: I will take an intervention from Mr Halcro Johnston.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: Is Clare Adamson absolutely sure that there are not children and young people who have been missing out at

school because they do not have the technology or the broadband that is required? Can she tell me how many such children there are, because I have struggled to get that information from the cabinet secretary?

Clare Adamson: I think that the issue is about local implementation. I have examples from one local authority area, where one school is ensuring that home support, digital or otherwise, is there for pupils, but where, unfortunately, there are other schools where that is not happening. It is for the local authorities to ensure that the proper support is there for pupils who are having to self-isolate at home.

I know that concerns have been raised about considerations such as the appropriateness of sitting exams, and I look forward to the cabinet secretary explaining how multiple absences will be considered when the appropriateness of sitting exams is assessed. *[Interruption.]*

I am sorry—I have already taken an intervention, and I am in my final few seconds.

It is a fact that 1,250 new teachers and support staff have been recruited and £80 million of support has been put in place. We must come together and work together to ensure that the implementation of the guidelines is consistent across Scotland to ensure the best outcome for our pupils.

15:27

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): When future generations come to study the Covid era, I am certain that two things will stand out: first, the extraordinarily difficult decisions that all Governments across the world have faced in battling a virus about which, remarkably—despite all our modern medicine—so little was known; and secondly, the very difficult balance that has had to be struck between safeguarding health and keeping the economy and our major institutions working. Education—schools, in particular—has been right in middle of that dilemma.

That dilemma is exacerbated by the fact that schools are far more than just the bricks and mortar to house classroom learning; they are institutions that reach well beyond educational purpose and which are so vital for social wellbeing. They matter hugely in complementing the work of parents; that they also matter to the pupils has been well exemplified by the comments of many young people and by their concerns about mental health when they have had to endure enforced absence from their school community. Schools bring a structure not only to learning but to extracurricular activity, which is so difficult at present, and to the social intercourse of the school

day, as well as being a forum for all sorts of advice and guidance.

Therefore, anything that we can do to ensure that schools stay open is to be warmly welcomed, most especially because the medical evidence suggests that schools are places of relatively low transmission, provided that all the necessary precautions are taken—although that will definitely not necessarily be the case in the future, as today's news from Fife schools witnesses.

Notwithstanding that, I sympathise with teachers. Their job is tough enough at the best of times, and I think that the pressure that they are under at the moment is, in many cases, hard to bear. I could never agree that strike action would help—indeed, I think that that would be quite the worst message to send to young people and their parents—but there is no doubt that teachers need support.

John Swinney has announced increased recruitment of teachers. That is very welcome, but I return to the question that I asked him several months ago about how many retired qualified teachers have been asked whether they could help out on a short-term basis. I think that a good number would be willing to assist, even if only by tutoring from home. It is surely important to address the high number of school absentees.

That also raises the issue of the very variable rates of online activity across our schools. Some are definitely disadvantaged by a lack of adequate digital infrastructure. That can, obviously, impact much more heavily on pupils in our poorer areas, where schools have fewer resources than some of their counterparts and those in the independent sector. In those schools, resources are much less of a problem and schools have therefore supported more concentrated online learning, especially for those with additional support needs—pupils that we must never forget.

One of the main issues has to be the pursuit of more frequent and rigorous Covid testing, not only to help to track the disease, but also to bring much-needed confidence to our schools. I understand and sympathise with those teachers who have chronic symptoms, who, however willing they may be, are simply not in a position to work safely in a school environment. That raises questions about their income and, in the longer term, their pension.

It was disappointing indeed to hear that, in one council area, teachers have been instructed not to use the NHS app. That does not seem to be best practice, nor does it demonstrate the consistency of messaging that is so crucial if we are to ensure that there is public understanding and compliance with the necessary guidelines.

Presiding Officer, 2020 has been a very grim experience for our schools. We should commend them for the way in which they have handled the exceptionally difficult circumstances, but it is our duty to support them in whatever way we can, and that is why the debate is so important, given the strength of feeling among parents and teachers that we can still do more.

I am pleased to support Jamie Greene's amendment.

15:31

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): I am grateful to Ross Greer and the Scottish Greens for lodging the motion, which we support. I put on the record my deep gratitude to pupils, staff and parents for all their efforts.

I declare an interest in the debate as the parent of a 14-year-old daughter. She is in S3 and she is enjoying being back at school, largely, I suspect, because she is getting to spend time with her friends.

Young people have missed out on so much during the pandemic, and they have not escaped the pain that has been caused by the virus—especially those who have been affected by close family bereavements. As the motion states, almost 30,000 pupils and more than 2,600 staff have been absent from school for Covid reasons. Those figures are one week old, but they are worrying.

Absence rates are affecting areas with higher levels of deprivation more, and the impacts are uneven across Scotland. I note from the Public Health Scotland report that was published today that the proportion of schools with pupils who have tested positive is highest in the NHS Lanarkshire and NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde areas. We need to understand better the link between self-isolation cases and deprivation, because parents in such areas will be the least likely to be able to afford private tuition to top up their children's education, and we are just going to see a further increase in the attainment gap.

As one teacher put it to me, schools are open full time, but they are not providing full-time education. We have to be honest about the experience of young people in schools. I can think of one young person who has not played her instrument in school since March, and others have not been able to fully participate in physical education. What more can we do to make sure that young people get the full education experience?

Ross Greer is absolutely right. Schools are struggling, and it is partly about resources. I hear what Clare Adamson says about the need for councils to interpret the guidance properly, but

teachers and school staff are drowning in emails and instructions. This week, we have had headteachers saying in the media that they are up until 2 o'clock in the morning dealing with contact tracing issues. I have constituents telling me that they are going through closed-circuit television footage to work out who was standing next to who in break-out areas. We are giving school staff a very difficult task.

We also need to be honest about the fact that, as Iain Gray said, there has already been a lot of disruption. Some young people have had to isolate more than once. Last night, I read that a school in Glenrothes has 400 pupils self-isolating, which is half of the school roll, and a small number of them have Covid, as do a small number of teachers.

We should not easily dismiss the number of young people who are getting Covid, because we do not yet know enough about the virus to fully understand the long-term health impacts for young people.

I am pleased that other speakers have mentioned pregnancy. I have a constituent in Lanarkshire who should be working at home, and she is getting very different advice from colleagues in other parts of the country. I say to the cabinet secretary that we cannot have a postcode lottery on health and safety.

I have an interest as a Lanarkshire resident: we are going to level 4 on Friday. Eleven local authorities in total are, so I understand why the EIS is calling for blended or remote learning in those areas.

This morning, Professor Leitch told the COVID-19 Committee that it is impossible to know where people are catching Covid. I understand why he is saying that, but we also keep hearing that it is not coming from schools. It is fair to say that people are losing a bit of confidence. We need more transparency and we need to see more data. As colleagues have said, we need more resources and support for our teachers, our young people and our families.

15:35

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): As a member of the Education and Skills Committee, I am pleased to be able to speak in the debate, which is on such an important topic.

There are points in the Green motion with which I agree whole-heartedly. Schools are the best place for teaching, and they must be safe for pupils and teachers during this horrible pandemic. That is an absolute priority of this Government. Absence rates of pupils and teachers should always be taken seriously. Disadvantaged areas

are being harder hit, which is, sadly, an all-too-familiar fact during this pandemic.

It is absolutely unacceptable for any teacher to feel pressured to return to school when they have been notified by the Protect Scotland app of a potential exposure risk, and it is absolutely unacceptable for clinically vulnerable teachers to be pressured into returning against the specific advice of their general practitioners. However, I do not accept the premise that the Government has not prepared adequately for the impact of Covid-19 on schools, or that those issues have not been addressed.

More than 1,250 new teachers and support staff have been recruited as a result of the £80 million of ring-fenced support that was announced in June. Plans are under way to recruit another 200 teachers. An additional 155 support staff have also been hired, with a further 100 expected to follow.

The Scottish Government's updated guidance on reducing the risks in schools has detailed information on all aspects of learning and working in schools during Covid-19. Crucially, arrangements are in place for staff who are concerned that they might have been at risk of infection to have informed access to testing through their employer, the local authority.

Of course, staffing arrangements are a matter for local authorities as employers, as others have said, and they have been doing an excellent job of coping with the challenges that Covid-19 has brought this year. The guidance makes it clear that councils and schools should ensure that risk assessments are in place, including for those who are at the highest risk.

The decisions on where teachers and school staff who have previously been shielding are deployed are for individual schools and local authorities. As the guidance outlines, risk assessments should consider measures that can be taken to lower the risk of transmission among staff and pupils in all parts of the school. Among a raft of safety advice, the guidance makes it clear that altering class size and composition is one option that schools can consider to help to maintain distancing.

My local authority area, East Dunbartonshire, is, like many others in the west of Scotland, currently at level 4. It is understandable that anxiety rates are high. As the First Minister outlined in her briefing today, the chief medical officer will issue a letter, similar to a fit note, that can be used in the few cases in which, following updating of risk assessments and discussions with employers, it is not possible to make a workplace safe for staff. That will last for as long as the local area is under level 4 restrictions. Staff should use the period that is covered by the letter to discuss further any

concerns with their employer—the local authority, in this instance—or an occupational health adviser. If, following individualised risk assessments, action results in adequate protection in the workplace, they will be able to continue to attend work.

The Green motion is well intentioned, but I ask that the Greens take on board the measures that the Scottish Government has put in place to keep pupils and staff safe. Our children and our amazing hard-working teachers should have all the support that they need during this extraordinary time.

15:39

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):

As we face the crisis that is caused by the Covid pandemic, it is incumbent on us to continue to question and challenge, and to continue to ask ourselves whether our approach is the very best that we can take. In some ways, the debate has been best encapsulated by the combination of Ross Greer's and Jamie Greene's opening speeches.

Of course, we must thank teachers and all the other staff in our schools for the efforts that they have undertaken. They are absolutely admirable, and they are a credit to themselves and our children.

However, we must also ensure that we are absolutely minimising the undoubted damage that is occurring to our children's education. That is the frame of reference for this debate, and that is right and proper.

I will try to cover a number of key themes, although I do not have much time.

On transparency, like Iain Gray, I welcome the paper that the Government has released. I have had criticisms of the Government's information in the past, but that paper is well referenced and useful. However, we must take care, because an article in *The Lancet*, which is the key article that that paper uses to point to the lack of evidence on transmission, admits that there is a dearth of evidence and that much of the evidence that it relies on is from studies of middle east respiratory syndrome, severe acute respiratory syndrome and the flu.

I agree with the conclusions, but we must have clarity, because, as Monica Lennon and others have pointed out, with rising absences from schools, there are a growing number of questions out there. Therefore, we must be calm and clear in the way that we use the information, if we are to maintain trust in the advice that is provided. That is absolutely key.

It is clear that there are questions around the mitigation steps that have been taken. Those questions have been well outlined by a number of members. Patrick Harvie made a very useful contribution in which he questioned the consistency in how mitigation steps have been implemented.

Clare Adamson is right that it is up to local authorities to implement measures, but the key issue that they face is that, before the crisis, many schools lacked the support staff that they needed to allow teachers to do anything other than teach. If that was a problem before the crisis, it is absolutely a problem during it. We are asking our teachers not just to teach our pupils, but to keep them safe and to implement track and trace—Ross Greer referred to that—and many other public safety measures. Schools simply need more staff, including cleaners and classroom assistants.

On an increase in teacher numbers, there are questions about whether teachers have arrived in schools. That does not even bring us back to the number of teachers that we had in 2007. We have to ask those questions.

We must also ensure that there is investment in school buildings and other mitigation steps that we have seen in other countries. Ultimately, that should be our benchmark. Other countries have, as a result of experience of SARS in Asia or, simply, better planning, implemented more effective steps. Iain Gray outlined the investment in ventilation in Germany. We must challenge ourselves to do better and to meet the standards and examples of the very best leading countries.

Perhaps testing is ultimately the most important issue. Liz Smith made that case very well. Until there is regular testing of asymptomatic individuals in schools so that we get an accurate picture of what is going on, questions will continue to be asked—not least because of the issues that Ross Greer outlined. There will be questions because of stories and issues that are raised.

I will sum up by asking the Government some simple questions. Can it improve the clarity and robustness of its scientific briefings? Can we continue to question and improve the mitigation steps, as well as the investments in our buildings and structures? Can there be additional staff so that there are smaller class sizes, and can there be more people to clean our school buildings? Can we roll out regular asymptomatic testing, using lateral flow tests, within our school estate? Ultimately, answers to those questions will enable people to have trust in the Government's response.

15:43

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I welcome the recognition around the chamber that the pandemic has been difficult for pupils and teachers across our schools. It is right that we are able to show our gratitude for the work that they have done in carrying on, and often in going the extra mile, when faced with such tough circumstances.

The main topic of the Greens' motion is the safety of staff and pupils. Safety must always be paramount in our minds, and it should be consistent. Teachers who are in the vulnerable category should not be expected to take different risks, depending on the council that employs them. Their employer should not tell them to turn off their test and protect apps when the First Minister tells them the opposite.

In the past couple of weeks, we have heard encouraging news about the development of vaccines. However, as we have seen from the announcements in several local authority areas in the central belt yesterday, we are a long way from having the pandemic under control.

I want to highlight the issue of mental health. It is likely that this period will have a continuing impact on pupils and staff alike. The consequences for mental health must be given equal importance to that which is given to the impact of the virus on physical health.

However, it is clear that there is broad frustration about transparency and clarity in the Scottish Government's guidance and direction. Ministers have continued to flirt with the idea of school closures, despite the guidance that was set down only a few short weeks ago, which envisaged that schools in level 4 areas would remain open with additional safety measures. As I have argued in the chamber, I believe that we must work hard to keep schools open safely, as far as that is possible. If there is a threat to that, parents and teachers should be made aware of how decisions will be made, rather than being left to rely on the judgment of the First Minister or the education secretary.

We know all too well that remote learning did not work effectively, and I have seen little evidence to suggest that it will improve if it is attempted for a second time. When I questioned ministers on making information technology equipment available to pupils who need it, that was repeatedly kicked down the line until schools had returned. Even now, it remains far from clear how that equipment has been allocated and how many pupils would be able to access a blended or remote learning approach. Education Scotland, which could have co-ordinated and driven remote learning, took a back seat.

After the return to schools, the Government was again painfully slow to respond when the need for additional teachers and support staff became obvious. Teachers who were entering the profession were left to question whether they would find employment, despite ministers' assurances. Inevitably, those who suffered most from all those cases were pupils from the most deprived backgrounds.

We have heard many positive contributions from around the chamber, and I welcome the Greens' approach to the debate. I do not have a huge amount of time, so I will focus on two of my colleagues' contributions. Jamie Greene highlighted the variable engagement with and by pupils across the country while schools were closed. It was clear and apparent to us all that good initiatives were offered for some, but that next to no education was offered to others during that time.

Liz Smith remarked on schools' broader role and their importance for social wellbeing, the structure that they provide for many pupils who attend them and the role of testing not only in tracking the disease, but in restoring confidence that the Government is listening and is addressing risks in schools.

We are at a crucial time in the course of the pandemic. As the Green Party's motion recognises, education is best delivered in the classroom. However, to continue to deliver it safely will require the sort of direction, support and leadership that has been so sadly lacking from the central Government since March.

15:47

John Swinney: I agree with a lot of what has been discussed in the debate. I think that Mr Greer characterised it fairly when he said that there is not an awful lot of difference or debate between political parties. However, this is one of those Opposition day afternoons.

Iain Gray raised the point that the desirability of having schools open is not being debated. I take the emphatic message from the Parliament that it wants schools to remain open and that schooling should be delivered full time. I take that message very seriously and, in representing what the Parliament wants to see, I will do everything that is in my power to make sure that that happens.

Daniel Johnson raised the need to continue to challenge mitigations. I respectfully say to him that that is precisely what the changes to the guidance have been all about. We have not stood still with the August guidance. We have enhanced the guidance to strengthen it on two separate occasions, and we will continue to do so, based on the clinical evidence that we are provided with.

Patrick Harvie, Clare Adamson and Rona Mackay all touched on the requirement on staff to participate in schooling when they had worries about their health. There are two key points in that regard. First, in contrast to the point that Mr Halcro Johnston made, the guidance is crystal clear: local authority employers must ensure that clinical advice is taken into account when agreeing appropriate mitigations with employees. There is no debate about that, and the guidance should be followed. It comes down to Clare Adamson's point that local authorities have a duty of care to their employees to decide exactly how an individual should be handled. In those circumstances, it is important that clinical input is taken into account.

Daniel Johnson: Will the cabinet secretary acknowledge that the ability to implement such measures comes down to schools having enough resources so that teachers are freed up from teaching?

John Swinney: I do not think that that is a fair point: if a member of staff is judged clinically not fit to be at school, they should not be at school, and there should be no debate about that. Local authorities should backfill from supply lists or other available resources.

Yesterday, Mr Rowley put a question to the First Minister about a Unison survey on the lack of supplementary cleaning in schools. I am bewildered by that point, because the Government has put in place additional resources of £50 million to pay for exactly the issue that Mr Rowley raised yesterday in his fair question to the First Minister. It is important that we implement the details in the guidance to make sure that schools are properly and fully cleaned.

Liz Smith said that it is important that we take forward education issues because of the strength of parental views. That is absolutely right. The Connect Research survey, which was published yesterday, shows that 70 per cent of parents are happy with the return to school and nursery. That did not feel like the feedback that I was getting from the points that members presented this afternoon.

Jamie Greene raised the issue of tutoring and mentoring, and Mr Halcro Johnson said that Education Scotland has not been co-ordinating anything. If they look at the e-Sgoil Twitter feed, they will find on offer for next week study support live webinar lessons for national 5 maths, advanced higher English, higher human biology, higher business management, national 5 physics, advanced higher physics, higher physics, national 5 computing science—

Johann Lamont: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

John Swinney: Of course.

Johann Lamont: I will take the cabinet secretary away from Twitter for once.

My concern is about disadvantaged young people who are not engaging with education at all. What work is being done to reach out to their families? Those young people did not engage during lockdown, disproportionate numbers of them have not come back to school and, should there be blended learning, they will not be able to take advantage of it. What work is being done to direct much-needed resources into those communities?

John Swinney: Given what Johann Lamont spends her time on Twitter doing, I do not think that she is in a position to tell me to spend less time on Twitter.

However, let me set that little, jocular, friendly remark aside, because Johann Lamont is right: schools being back is crucial to reaching those families and engaging them. Over the summer and the period of lockdown, schools did a phenomenal job of reaching young people in disadvantaged circumstances to try to ensure that they were well supported.

The Government is wholly committed to ensuring that we do all that we can to work with local authorities. Local authorities have worked immensely hard. They worked with others on the guidance—as Clare Adamson set out, producing that guidance has been a joint venture. It has to be—and will be—applied in full. Interestingly, the Health and Safety Executive, which looked at the safety of school staff, gave a very positive assessment of the way in which the guidance has been applied at a local level within schools. We should take confidence and encouragement from that independent assessment of the performance of schools, and we should give thanks to our teachers.

I point out that my amendment actually does thank teachers, and I encourage members not to vote against it, because they would be voting against words that thank teachers for their contributions, which enable us to build on achievements, ensure that we keep our schools safe and deliver education for children and young people the length and breadth of our country.

15:53

Ross Greer: It is good to hear support across the chamber for the proposals in the motion, as well as for the amendments from Iain Gray and Jamie Greene.

I will reflect on a couple of points that were raised in the debate. Jamie Greene and Clare Adamson both addressed the issue of councils' responsibility, although they came at it from

opposite directions. To Clare Adamson and the Government, I say that the local authorities might be the employer, but teachers' terms and conditions are agreed on a tripartite basis that includes the Scottish Government, and that, ultimately, matters of public health are the Government's responsibility. It cannot simply pass that issue over to local authorities and assign any blame to them.

John Swinney: I hear what Mr Greer is saying, but the guidance is crystal clear that clinical information must be taken into account in the risk assessment of an individual member of staff. I am not empowered to take that decision, because I am not the employer of a single teacher in the country; that is the responsibility of local authorities.

Ross Greer: The cabinet secretary is right to say that he cannot make an intervention in the case of individual staff members where there is an issue with their employer, but the Government has overall enforcement powers when it comes to issues of public health. That is the issue that the Opposition is raising.

I will come back to that point in a moment, but I want the cabinet secretary to bear it in mind. He made some remarks about the Health and Safety Executive, but what he has been told by Parliament today is something quite different. That is what we are being told by teachers, support staff, pupils and parents, and it is a point that the Government needs to take on board.

Iain Gray talked about the need for updated guidance and advice to be published regularly to give staff, pupils and everyone else involved confidence in the system. That is absolutely key, particularly when we raise issues, as Jamie Halcro Johnston did, about the mental health impact of the situation. There is a huge amount of anxiety, even among those who are not clinically vulnerable.

Iain Gray's amendment talks about ventilation. An article in the English-language version of the Spanish newspaper *El País* has been cited regularly by Government ministers and Scottish Government health officials. The article demonstrates the problem with a lack of ventilation in the classroom and how that aids transmission of the virus. I hope that the Government can bring itself to support the Labour amendment today.

Issues around additional cleaning staff were raised by, I think, Iain Gray, and by the cabinet secretary when he talked about the question that Alex Rowley raised with the First Minister yesterday. I know that additional money has been allocated for cleaning staff, but it clearly does not go far enough and there is an issue with where it is being deployed.

Yesterday, I was contacted by the head of an early years centre. She informed me that additional cleaning staff in her school were being deployed to all the primary school classrooms and, as well as taking on front-line delivery responsibilities—she has staff who are self-isolating—and test-and-protect responsibilities, she is now also the person who is primarily responsible for cleaning her nursery every single day. We are all well aware of bodily fluids being more of a problem in nurseries than they are in primary school classrooms. That is a huge burden for anyone.

Patrick Harvie talked specifically about Glasgow and mentioned comments from council staff that teachers cannot possibly teach from home. I am not saying that there is a simple solution but, given that substantial numbers of young people in areas such as Glasgow that are in level 4 have to learn remotely because they are shielding, could shielding staff not be given the responsibility of working with them on a remote learning basis? Would it not make sense to at least try to explore that option, which I believe a number of councils have not explored?

Liz Smith and Daniel Johnson talked about testing bringing confidence. We know that mass, regular testing is key to suppressing the virus, but it is also key to giving people the confidence to go to work believing that they are safe. The mental health issues that Jamie Halcro Johnston raised are again relevant here.

During the past few years, the Education and Skills Committee has repeatedly taken evidence on the mental health strain on teachers. Before the pandemic, 40 per cent of teachers in Scotland were considering leaving the profession. What impact will the pandemic have on teachers? We are talking about vulnerable—extremely vulnerable, in some cases—members of staff. I therefore come back to the point about enforcement. It is fair for the Government to say that the guidance is strong enough if that is what it believes, although I would dispute that, as would teachers, union officials and others I have spoken to—it is too vague in key areas. However, if the guidance is strong enough, the issue becomes one of enforcement, and the Government cannot avoid its responsibility in relation to enforcement.

I will round off the debate by bringing up the cases of two vulnerable members of school staff who got in touch with me. One is a primary teacher who taught the youngest children at a primary school and requested that, from August, in line with the guidance, she be given an older class—primary 6 or 7—because it would be easier to maintain some level of social distancing. That request was denied. At seven or eight months

pregnant, she subsequently tested positive after a number of pupils in her class displayed symptoms.

I found the second case extremely distressing. A teacher who had lost a child during a previous pregnancy and whose current pregnancy is considered high risk requested to work from home. Her request, which was supported by all her doctors, occupational health professionals and so on, was rejected out of hand by her employer. That is simply not good enough. Those are not isolated incidents; they are happening across the country.

We all want our young people's education to suffer as little as possible during the pandemic, but we also all want pupils and staff to be safe, and we all acknowledge that that is quite hard to achieve right now. The proposals that have been laid out today will, I believe, achieve the support of Parliament, and they will get us somewhat closer to that goal. It is clear that there is broad agreement in Parliament about how we can do that, and I close by asking the Government to take that on board and deliver the protection that teachers, school support staff and pupils deserve.

Declaration of a Nature Emergency

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-23383, in the name of Mark Ruskell, on declaration of a nature emergency.

16:00

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Today, I will move my motion to declare a nature emergency in Scotland and commit to an emergency response, reversing the decline and restoring nature to its former abundance and glory. I thank the more than 8,000 people who, in the past three days alone, have taken action to add their voices to declaring a nature emergency in Scotland. We live in days of great crisis and uncertainty. The health, climate and nature emergencies have formed a perfect storm, but in addressing those crises together there are opportunities to grow a green recovery that supports new livelihoods while building up our resilience in the face of devastating climate change.

We are in a global nature emergency, but we cannot ignore the fact that the emergency is real in Scotland, too. One in nine of our species are in danger of extinction and last year's "State of Nature" report showed that we have lost the vast majority of our wild flower meadows and species such as the great yellow bumblebee with them. Half of our skylarks are gone and many of our wetlands and other precious habitats, too. The abundance of species in Scotland has collapsed by nearly a quarter in the past 25 years and there has been no slowing in that catastrophic rate of decline in the past decade: 265 plants, 153 fungi and lichens, 92 vertebrates and 132 invertebrates are all at risk of extinction from the threats of intensive farming, industrial development, invasive species and climate change.

That crisis demands the same level of attention and action as the climate emergency and the first step is to declare it for what it truly is—a nature emergency. The second step on the journey to recovery must be legislation. Just as our legally binding climate targets have brought focus and scrutiny, so, too, are nature recovery targets needed in law to commit to halting the decline within a decade and fully restoring nature soon after. The Scottish Government must put targets for nature recovery on a statutory footing, with clear milestones, giving certainty to everyone that they will be delivered and that the funding and planning will follow.

Part of that recovery must involve designating new protected sites. We have already seen both

the United Kingdom and the European Union commit to a target of 30 per cent of our land and sea being protected by 2030. However, because of weak legislation and no targets we have seen minimal progress here in Scotland. Take the designation of marine protected areas, for example. The 2016 programme for government committed to 18 new protected areas for seabirds by 2017, but so far not a single one has been delivered and discussions are still on-going. Time is running out for many birds such as the Arctic tern.

Those protected sites must be delivered, but simply drawing a line on a map is not enough. They cannot be paper parks but must come with meaningful protections, monitoring and investment. Designating marine protected areas without fisheries management measures and proper licensing of other activities is weak. One in five of our protected features in Scotland are in an unfavourable condition—they are not recovering. The nature emergency is worsening and action is needed.

Alongside those designated sites, we need corridors of habitats for species to flow along. The need for an ecological network that spans landscapes, and the whole country, is critical. Two years ago, Parliament supported my motion to back the formation of a national ecological network, but two years on I see no urgency from Government to set that up. That national infrastructure is the very nature of Scotland itself, and it must be the centrepiece of the next national planning framework.

There is an opportunity for a partnership that links the recovery of both nature and the economy through a green new deal to improve the health of our environment, which already provides more than £20 billion in ecosystems services—from crop pollination to recreation—to our economy every year.

The sectors that are holding back progress in restoring nature need to be challenged by strong agencies, with the force of the law behind them. Government must lead the change rather than papering over issues with false consensus. The salmon farming sector, for example, continues to plan rapid expansion in MPAs, which threatens maerl and flame shell beds with pollution and directly contravenes the recommendations of the Parliament's salmon farming inquiry.

At the same time, however, there are wonderful crofters, farmers, foresters, estate owners, charities and communities driving forward their vision of habitat restoration, rewilding, agro-ecology and species reintroduction in practical and exciting ways. There are kelp harvesters, creelers, scallop divers and eco-tourism operators who are working with our communities to show us what is

hidden beneath the waves and to protect it. There are young people who are desperate to join them and tackle the nature emergency. Today, we should declare that nature emergency, both for them and for the shared future of our planet.

I move,

That the Parliament notes with grave concern the catastrophic collapse in biodiversity globally and in Scotland, with one in nine species threatened with extinction from Scotland, and therefore declares a nature emergency; believes that restoring nature should be a central component of green economic recovery and future rural support, stimulating the economy and creating jobs; calls for urgent legislation to halt the loss of biodiversity and to enable nature to recover through a coherent national ecological network, including well-managed, protected sites in good condition comprising at least 30% of Scotland's sea and land by 2030, a third of which should be fully protected; calls for an end to driven grouse moor management practices, large-scale peat extraction and damaging fishing practices in sensitive marine environments, and further calls on the Scottish Government to introduce a moratorium on salmon farm expansion until the concerns raised in the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee's 2018 report on salmon farming in Scotland are fully addressed.

The Presiding Officer: Opening for the Government is the Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform, who joins us remotely.

16:06

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform (Roseanna Cunningham): Internationally, a new global biodiversity framework is being developed, and Scotland is adopting a leadership role in contributing to that process. The new framework will be agreed in China in 2021. In leading the Edinburgh process, we have mobilised a global network of national Governments, cities and local authorities and are feeding their views into the process to develop the new framework.

In May last year, Scotland became the first country in the world to declare a climate emergency. In my statement to Parliament at that time, I highlighted the global crisis for biodiversity alongside the global climate emergency. The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services had published the most comprehensive global assessment of biodiversity for many years, bringing the on-going decline in biodiversity into sharp focus. In response, the First Minister stated in Parliament that

“biodiversity... is as important as the challenge on climate change”

and that we would

“ensure that our actions produce the transformative change that is needed”—[*Official Report*, 9 May 2019; c 24-25.]

to address biodiversity loss.

Our document “The Environment Strategy for Scotland: vision and outcomes”, which we published in February, also explicitly recognises the twin global climate and nature crises.

Scotland's natural environment is our greatest national asset. It provides the foundations on which our society and economy depend and improves our physical and mental health. It is also crucial to Scotland's businesses, brand and reputation.

While most Governments obviously continue to prioritise their response to Covid-19, it is clear that the other global emergency, climate change, has not gone away. Climate change and biodiversity loss are twin crises and must be tackled as such; I restate that, in one form or another, practically every single day.

Building a green recovery is at the heart of our response to the pandemic. The programme for government announced a new national mission to help create new green jobs and dedicate £100 million over the next five years to a green jobs fund. That includes boosting youth employment opportunities and targeting future skills and capacity requirements in nature and land-based jobs. We will do that by expanding existing apprenticeship and undergraduate schemes in public agencies, including in Scottish Forestry and Forestry and Land Scotland, which will double their existing commitments. We are also developing a green workforce and skills development package with an initial skills gap analysis being undertaken by NatureScot.

Projects that address biodiversity loss are a key element of our climate change adaptation plans. Nature helps to regulate our climate, and the changing climate is a major factor affecting the state of nature. Both require us to address the impact of our choices on the health of our natural environment.

Supporting biodiversity and nature-based solutions is an essential part of the action that this Government is taking to put us on track to a just transition to net zero by 2045, and the forthcoming update on the climate change plan will say more on that.

We have significantly increased funding for peatland restoration, committing £250 million over 10 years to restore 250,000 hectares of peatland by 2030. That will help the sector to develop, with an aim to create about 200 new jobs over three to five years, mostly in rural and remote areas. Multiyear funding means that contractors have greater confidence to invest in skills and machinery, and landowners are already coming forward to discuss potential large-scale projects.

Scotland's forests and woodlands have an important role to play in our green recovery and in

delivering our commitment to net zero carbon emissions by 2045. Woodland creation, including native trees, is a key component of that. We aim to increase woodland cover to 21 per cent of the country's total area by 2032, and the target for woodland creation is increasing to 18,000 hectares a year by 2024-25. That will deliver economic, social and environmental benefits, including by helping to develop new networks for nature.

As members will be aware, our recent programme for government announced that we would publish a high-level statement of intent on biodiversity before the end of the year. That is against the backdrop of the on-going delays to the negotiations on a new global biodiversity framework, which are provisionally to resume next year and to conclude in May.

We are already doing a great deal, but we acknowledge that more is required. We are continuing to support existing projects and to seek out biodiversity improvements pending the revision of our Scottish biodiversity strategy to reflect the new global biodiversity framework.

My colleague Mairi Gougeon will reference the remaining parts of the somewhat overburdened Green motion at the close of this short debate. I have to say that a cynical person might assume that the motion has been designed to fail.

I move amendment S5M-23383.4, to leave out from "therefore declares" to end and insert:

"calls for the continued treatment of climate change and biodiversity loss on a twin-crises basis as set out in the Scottish Government's Environment Strategy; believes that restoring nature should be a central component of recovery; welcomes therefore the Scottish Government's commitment to a green recovery that captures the opportunities of a just transition to net zero, creates good, green jobs and leaves no one behind; further welcomes the advice of the Just Transition Commission and others in this regard; recognises that 34% of Scotland's waters are already covered by MPAs, including the West of Scotland MPA, which is the largest in European waters and is accepted as 'internationally significant' by the Convention on Biological Diversity; further recognises that, while Scotland constitutes only 32% of UK land mass, it accounts for 54% of the UK's nature-specific protected areas; acknowledges the Scottish Government's multi-annual commitment of £250 million to restore peatland and commends NatureScot for its contribution to restoration via PeatlandACTION; commends the work of Professor Werritty and the Grouse Moor Management Review Group, and expects the Scottish Government's response to this imminently, and notes the Scottish Government's commitment to protect the marine environment and support sustainable growth in fishing and fish farming while maintaining the right balance across Scotland's economic, environmental and social responsibilities."

16:11

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am grateful to the Greens for bringing this debate to

Parliament, first because it is all too easy in these pandemic days to ignore the other huge issues of our time, and secondly because of the imminence of COP26—the 26th conference of the parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity—at which Scotland has the opportunity to demonstrate that she is a world leader in shaping both climate change and biodiversity. That will also be a key moment for scrutiny of the Scottish Government's environment record—more on which we will hear later from my colleague Maurice Golden.

We can agree with the first part of the Greens' motion, because it highlights the key issues in biodiversity. However, it will not be a surprise to the Parliament that we cannot agree with the second part of the motion, specifically about the demand to end driven grouse shooting and controlled muirburn, which is why I seek to amend the motion accordingly.

It goes without saying that Scotland starts from a good place, as I think the cabinet secretary said in her speech, given how rich our biodiversity and natural landscapes are, and there is no question about the unanimity on parliamentarians' duty to maintain and restore them to the highest environmental standards. We need to understand those landscapes and to safeguard and enhance them. We know—perhaps even more so because of Covid—just how important our wild lands, nature parks and green spaces have become, as well as our farms, aquaculture and plantations, especially because of the vast array of ecosystems that have such positive benefits for our wellbeing.

The changing attitudes in large swathes of public opinion are most encouraging, with much more understanding and appreciation of the role that nature has to play. Set against that, however, are some very worrying warning signals, many of which Mark Ruskell spoke about in his opening speech. For me, one of the most frightening was a United Nations report published last year, which revealed that a million species of plants and animals are at risk of extinction. In the United Kingdom, 56 per cent of our species have declined over the past 50 years. That situation could hardly be more serious.

I cannot deal with every theme that I would like to mention in the very short time that I have in the debate, but there are some important ones. First, the focus must be on scientific facts. Not only do we have a wealth of natural landscapes in Scotland; we also have a wealth of ecological and scientific expertise, and it is vitally important that policy is underpinned by the facts rather than by the hyperbole and raw emotion that sometimes dominate environmental debates. For example, the recent abuse that has been directed at landowners and gamekeepers as they seek to

improve biodiversity is completely unacceptable and unwarranted, especially because the facts show that so many of them have done so much to protect and enhance the land on which they work, particularly in recent years.

Only two weeks ago, Scottish Government-commissioned research, led by Scotland's Rural College and the James Hutton Institute, concluded that driven grouse shooting hugely benefits Scotland's rural economy, especially by sustaining jobs.

On that theme, there is encouraging evidence that several species have increased as a result of carefully controlled muirburn—golden plovers, merlins and curlews, to name some—and we know about the encouraging results to enhance ecosystems from the Langholm study.

Secondly, NFU Scotland, Scottish Land & Estates, the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust and the British Association for Shooting and Conservation all make important points about a holistic approach to biodiversity—for example, agriculture has done really well recently on the reduction of emissions and the harnessing of renewable electricity—but they want to see a joint approach, especially when it comes to regional land use and clusters, which are working well in England.

Those farmers who want to be involved in peatland restoration, tree planting or the development of wildlife habitats, because they know that it is the right thing to do, need support and financial incentives to ensure that we have rural jobs and investment. They need help too, by way of grants, to prevent the spread of invasive species, such as rhododendron, giant hogweed or beavers, which cause extensive riparian damage. My colleague Finlay Carson will speak about aspects of our water quality, which—we should not forget—is so important for our beaches, lochs and rivers.

Another concern is about the small, but nonetheless growing, minority of people who, through their selfishness and irresponsibility, choose to make life much harder for our land managers by their deliberate disregard for the countryside and national park codes. Those people dump rubbish, destroy trees, despoil our beaches and lochs and encroach in many other ways on our ability to increase biodiversity. The point is therefore not necessarily just about the improvement of our biodiversity, but about ensuring that everybody understands its importance and that far fewer people are in a position to scar our nature.

I move amendment S5M-23383.1, to leave out from “at least 30%” to end and insert:

“as much of Scotland's sea and land by 2030 as is achievable in relation to managed agricultural land use; acknowledges the good progress that has been made with controlled muirburn to increase carbon capture in peatlands and to enhance natural habitats, and calls on the Scottish Government to address the concerns raised in the 2018 Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee report regarding damaging practices in salmon farming and to work more closely with inshore fisheries groups to help preserve sensitive maritime areas.”

16:16

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank Mark Ruskell for raising this important issue for debate. Biodiversity is far more important to our country than many people might realise. It underpins a healthy environment and is the foundation for many jobs, a key part of Scottish tourism, an inspiration and a joy for us all and for Scotland's great cultural figures, past and present.

Scottish Labour stands for many points in Mark Ruskell's motion. Scottish Labour, like the Greens, has long stated that we face a nature emergency, which goes with the climate emergency. However, we cannot support the Green motion unless it is with our amendment, which recognises the need for rapid change, while respecting the challenges that rural and coastal communities face, through an urgently needed just transition, which would bring support for that change through our communities.

The Tory amendment shows that, frankly, the Tories do not recognise the urgent need for change, so we cannot support it. It is a serious cause for concern that the Scottish Government is not prepared to recognise the need for the declaration of a nature emergency, which is inextricably fused with the already declared climate emergency. Thus, we cannot support the Government amendment.

It is regrettable that, under the SNP, it looks as if we have now missed many targets for biodiversity, some of which are legally binding, although I acknowledge that other countries have done so, too. That should come as no surprise when we see that, according to Scottish Environment LINK, funding for environmental bodies has been slashed by 40 per cent in real terms since 2010. There simply must be a turnaround in the 2020s, and a robust and well-funded biodiversity route map and action plan is the Scottish Government's responsibility. Scottish Labour wants targets for nature recovery to be set into legislation, and I look forward to arguing for my amendments to take effect in the UK Withdrawal from the European Union (Continuity) (Scotland) Bill.

Most urgently, focus must be turned to a green recovery for those who work with and for nature in rural and remote parts of Scotland. Some of those sectors already face precarious futures. Planning

for the future also needs to happen so that we have skills for long-term projects, such as planting native woodlands and the restoration of precious peatlands, which are in such need of our protection.

I highlight that, in several weeks, conservationists hope that the heart of the flow country—an area of 1,400km² of almost pristine peatland—will have taken a significant step to becoming the first peatland globally to win world heritage site status. Let us all be sure to highlight that to the UK Government as it comes forward.

We need to enhance, connect and expand all habitat and look to build a nature network, which RSPB Scotland states would create 300 direct jobs. The NFUS highlights the good work that farmers can do as custodians of our environment and the need for advice and support to build a sustainable future for them. Will the cabinet secretary tell us in closing what action is being taken in response to the just transition commission's recommendation 4, which is for a green recovery to promote investment and to protect and grow the rural economy and employment?

Of course, that also applies to coastal communities and marine environments, which just as urgently need a blue recovery. Investing in marine nature and its recovery and taking on illegal and inappropriate fishing activity now will develop widespread benefits and help to create more resilient economies. I ask the cabinet secretary to protect the iconic flapper skate, which is so close to extinction. Often overlooked, it is very disappointing to see that the recovery of our seas has been completely absent from the Scottish Government's economic recovery implementation plan.

There should also be more locally led action involving communities, local authorities, landowners, farmers and more. More equitable land ownership will improve management of land in the public interest and in the face of our dual emergencies. Many local authorities across the UK are working with Plantlife to plant wild flowers on verges and much more. There has been a 20 per cent drop in floral diversity along our road verges since 1990, and that simple act can save money, save bees and brighten our communities.

I welcome the debate. Our environment deserves strategy and funding from empowered local authorities and communities, and from a bold Government. Let us not forget that, as human beings, we are part of those ecosystems as well.

I move amendment S5M-23383.3, to leave out from "calls for an end" to end and insert:

"calls for an urgent and robust licensing scheme for driven grouse moor management, the phase out of large-

scale peat extraction and addressing damaging fishing practices in sensitive marine environments; further calls on the Scottish Government to urgently address the concerns raised in the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee's 2018 report, and letter from the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee, on salmon farming in Scotland; recognises the multiple benefits of a holistic approach to land use planning, through regional land use partnerships and more equitable forms of ownership; understands the need for nature skills development for now and the next generation of rural jobs; recognises the contributions of communities and individuals to improving biodiversity, and acknowledges the need for further support for these and local authority action."

The Presiding Officer: I remind all members that speeches should be of four minutes. Mr McArthur joins us remotely.

16:22

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): Our planet is on the brink of irreparable damage, and Parliament recognised that in declaring the climate emergency. The Scottish Liberal Democrats agree that it is time to do likewise in response to the existential threat facing so many species and so much of our biodiversity and declare a nature emergency. I therefore thank Mark Ruskell for enabling the debate. Although our amendment was not selected, I am pleased that the amendment in Claudia Beamish's name captures much of what we had proposed and I confirm that we will support it at decision time.

Members will recall that, in the pre-pandemic age, we entered 2020 with the spectre of apocalyptic wildfires in Australia, which were declared among

"the worst wildlife disasters in modern history".

Since then, large parts of the US have similarly been ablaze. Extreme weather, and the fires, floods and droughts that follow, are becoming more common, and take a heavy toll on nature. Meanwhile, an estimated 1 million animal and plant species are now at risk of extinction because of human activities. As Scottish Environment LINK and others point out, 49 per cent of species in Scotland have declined, and one in nine is threatened with national extinction.

The climate crisis and biodiversity loss are not separate issues. As others have observed, they are deeply intertwined, in sickness and in health. There is no doubt that human actions lie at the heart of the degradation of the natural world that we have seen, but human actions can also help to repair, restore and revitalise. The good news is that the natural world is on our side. Despite all the technologies that we will invest in, a biodiverse ecosystem offers us the surest means of storing carbon and reducing emissions. That is why, as the motion makes clear, nature jobs and skills

must be at the heart of the Government's green recovery plans.

Scotland's peatlands, for example, could and should be one of our greatest assets. They deserve protection, with a phasing out of large-scale extraction and long-term support for restoration efforts that have already proved their value. It is time, too, for legislation to introduce licensing of grouse moor management, ensuring that all practices are sustainable and compatible with declarations of a climate and nature emergency. Legislation is also needed to halt the loss of biodiversity and to allow for the creation of more coherent nature networks.

However, as our amendment highlighted, addressing the nature emergency will not simply happen in rural areas, which is a challenge for all parts of Scotland, as it is around the world. That is why the Scottish Government's continuity bill must be amended next week to provide greater confidence that funding, high environmental standards and robust independent oversight will continue after the UK leaves the European Union next year.

Like the climate, nature does not care about the constitution. It cannot afford to wait as we embark on more drawn-out and divisive navel gazing over independence. The nature and climate emergencies require us to use the considerable powers, resources and ingenuity that we already have to deliver the change that we need. Scottish Liberal Democrats are committed to playing our part in delivering that change.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you for your good timekeeping, Mr McArthur.

16:25

Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green): The Government's amendment would remove the call from the Scottish Greens for the Parliament to declare a nature emergency. In the amendment, the Government prefers to use the word "crises" and to blow its own trumpet, yet one in nine species in Scotland faces extinction. Every other party in the chamber accepts that we face a nature emergency, and thousands of our constituents support our call, as do nature conservation groups such as RSPB Scotland, Wildlife and Countryside Link, WWF Scotland and Open Seas. They recognise the severity of the situation and the need for action.

The mountain hare, which is one of our most iconic native mammals, is regarded as "near threatened" on the first red list of UK mammals. Its population status is reported as "unfavourable" by the Government's nature agency. It is therefore no surprise that despite this Parliament's vote—five months ago yesterday—to make the mountain

hare a protected species, which was warmly welcomed by the huge number of people who campaigned to that end and by the overwhelming majority of people in Scotland who support an end to the indiscriminate culling of mountain hares, we are still waiting for the Government to commence the power to bring the protection into effect.

Time and time again, the Scottish Government has the power to act, but chooses not to. The persecution of birds of prey continues with impunity, and we are still waiting for an official response to Professor Werritty's review, which was the Government's can-kicking response to raptor persecution that was announced in May 2017. The process has taken years. Beavers, which the Government pledged to protect, are being killed, or even exported, in huge numbers—anything to get rid of them.

Much of the cruelty inflicted on wildlife in Scotland is wholly legal—snares, traps and stink pits abound. Scotland's driven grouse moors account for much of the killing; they are burnt and managed to the point of monoculture, despite the fact that we are in the midst of a nature and climate emergency. *[Interruption.]*

I cannot take an intervention, as I have less than one minute left in which to speak.

Our motion calls for an end to driven grouse shooting. That activity, which is enjoyed by the few, takes up an area that is half the size of Wales. It stifles nature, to put it mildly, and its contribution to Scotland's economy is minuscule. It is a relic of a bygone era, so let us consign it to the dustbin of history, where it belongs. It is holding back alternative land uses, of which there are many and better, including forestry, rewilding, repopulation and eco-tourism, the latter of which already brings in five times as much to the Scottish economy as grouse shooting. Thankfully, people are far more interested in shooting Scotland's animals on film than they are in shooting them with guns.

Those alternatives would enable nature to thrive and would provide many more well-paid jobs than the grouse industry. Liz Smith will be aware that the average job in the grouse industry attracts a salary of £11,000, below the minimum wage. Licensing the grouse industry will not address the fact that that cruel activity is a shocking waste of space and is one that, in the face of the mass extinction of species and the climate emergency, we should no longer tolerate.

I support the Green motion.

16:28

Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP): Our environment is a subject that is close to the hearts

not only of people who live in rural Scotland but of those who live in urban Scotland, including many parts of my constituency, Cowdenbeath.

I am proud of the Scottish National Party Scottish Government's determination to protect and promote our environment. As we have heard, Scotland was the first country in the world to declare a climate emergency; we have world-leading climate change targets; and we have undertaken to proceed with a build-back-better post-Covid-19 green recovery. As the cabinet secretary said, we have recognised the key importance of biodiversity, and we have adopted a twin approach of tackling biodiversity loss right alongside the climate emergency.

On the important issue of biodiversity, I welcome the Scottish Government's recently announced plans to commission a new Scottish centre of expertise in biodiversity. That forms part of a new draft strategy for the environment, natural resources and agriculture research programme, which is currently out for consultation—the consultation will close on 14 December, I think. I encourage my constituents and others to have a look at that, to make their views known and to indicate what priorities and delivery mechanisms they would like to see in the five key areas of plant and animal health, sustainable food systems, human impacts on the environment, natural resources, and rural futures.

That work builds on the current research programme, which has involved £48 million of funding from the Scottish Government. It has supported 1,500 jobs and helped research institutes in Scotland to leverage in £28 million of additional funding. That approach demonstrates that the Scottish Government wants Scotland to play a key role in developing environmental solutions that are based on the best possible scientific evidence.

We can also see that determination in the very significant investment in peatland restoration, with £20 million allocated in this year's budget and a commitment to invest £250 million over the next 20 years. We can see it, again, in forestry. Scotland has delivered more than 80 per cent of all new tree planting across the UK, with 22 million trees planted over the past year or so.

A lot of progress has been made in the area of sustainable fish farming, in particular, further to the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee's comprehensive report, which was published in November 2018, on the future of salmon farming in Scotland. I note that the Scottish Government has established a 10-year farmed fish health framework, under which a wide range of specific work streams are under way.

Further, the salmon interactions working group was set up, under John Goodlad as independent chair, to look at the issues surrounding the interaction of farmed and wild salmon. It recently reported—I believe in May of this year—with more than 40 recommendations. It would be interesting to hear from the minister as to where matters stand on that, taking into account of course the fact that the report was published during lockdown and we have seen the global pandemic play out since that time. I also refer to the Scottish Environment Protection Agency's detailed plan on future regulation, which was published in 2018.

Those issues are of course very important to my constituents. Mowi, which is based in Rosyth, has more than 600 jobs at the site. The call from the Scottish Green Party, in its motion today, for a moratorium on expansion is likely to be a cause of considerable concern to all those workers and their families, who will obviously be worried about the consequential impacts on their jobs and livelihoods.

There is a range of initiatives across Scotland, in many different sectors. Four minutes is not nearly long enough to do them all justice.

One final issue that has not been discussed is the impact of Brexit on our high environmental standards. With, I think, 43 days to go, we still do not know what on earth the position is going to be. What a shambles on the part of the UK Government! The Tory MSPs are all sitting there, grinning away, as if that is good news for our environment, but it is very bad news for our environment.

16:33

Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con): The danger that Scotland's wildlife faces is summed up in what is arguably the most important line in today's motion:

“one in nine species”

is

“threatened with extinction from Scotland”

That statistic should give us all reason to pause.

The latest Scottish biodiversity strategy report shows that the average abundance of some 352 terrestrial and freshwater species has plummeted—down 24 per cent since 1994. Of particular concern is the fact that Scottish seabird breeding populations have dropped dramatically—down 32 per cent between 1986 and 2017. In total, according to the “State of Nature Scotland Report 2019”, of those species that show either strong or moderate changes in numbers, 49 per cent have decreased.

There is a clear need to act, as the First Minister seemed to agree last year, when she told Scottish Environment LINK:

“The challenges facing biodiversity are as important as the challenge of climate change, and I want Scotland to be leading the way in our response.”

I want that too, but the First Minister made that commitment knowing that her Government was failing to live up to it.

A 2017 Scottish Natural Heritage report found that the SNP was failing to deliver 13 out of the 20 Aichi biodiversity targets. On some 16 out of 30 of the SNP’s biodiversity indicators, the position is worsening or stagnating. In fact, over the past 10 years, there has been no significant change in the rate of species decline.

The SNP has no plan. The biodiversity strategy is seven years out of date and the wildlife strategy was never published. That lack of direction comes at the worst time, when protecting our natural heritage gives us the best shot at building back better because, as WWF points out, our natural heritage is worth up to £23 billion to the economy—not to mention the climate change benefits.

Nowhere is that more evident than in rural communities, where farmers and rural businesses are working hard to protect the countryside and create jobs. By working alongside them, we can help them to go further.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): Many of those farmers benefit from LEADER funding. Does the member know what the UK Government will replace LEADER funding with?

Maurice Golden: The UK Government has been quite clear that it plans to ensure that the funding relating to Europe continues and that processes will be more streamlined, so that more funding goes directly to the people who need it. I whole-heartedly agree with that approach. It is no surprise that SNP members cannot come up with an intervention on biodiversity and would prefer to talk about Brexit and other matters. Natural heritage is important and it is disappointing that the SNP—indeed, the convener of the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee—is unable to speak about biodiversity and natural heritage.

The Scottish Conservatives propose a package of financial and technical assistance to create up to 15,000 hectares of high-quality woodland each year, restore peatland and create new hiking and nature trails, thereby saving habitats, creating carbon sinks and generating green jobs. A programme of school farms would enable children to learn about wildlife, environmental protection and food production, bringing knowledge of such efforts to the next generation in our cities. Cities

present the greatest opportunity to enhance biodiversity and boost health and wellbeing, as WWF points out. New green spaces and networks would create wildlife corridors, help to reduce pollution and give residents more access to nature.

It is unfortunate that the SNP is not delivering for Scotland’s biodiversity and natural heritage. I hope that the measures that I have proposed can be a starting point for consensus, and I hope that there is consensus on action before more of our biodiversity disappears.

16:38

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): I very much welcome the chance to debate our nature emergency, but I must say that I am surprised and disappointed that the Scottish Government proposes to delete the term “nature emergency” from the motion. That is especially shocking given the need to ensure that we not only protect our natural environment as we tackle the climate emergency but take a joined-up approach to creating green jobs and green infrastructure. Those things have to go together. The removal of the reference to an “emergency” seems like the removal of the priority to invest in the environment on equal terms so that, now and beyond the pandemic, we address the stark social inequalities in Scotland and deliver a green and just transition. This is absolutely not the time for more of the same economic arguments.

Several members mentioned peatlands. Peatlands cover more than 20 per cent of Scotland’s land area and play a vital role in carbon storage, thereby combating the effects of climate change. They play a vital role in maintaining Scotland’s water quality and rich biodiversity. They also reduce flood risk and support farming and crofting. As Claudia Beamish said, it is vital that our peatlands are properly protected and invested in. As with the national parks, we need a joined-up approach to land use management that brings wider benefits.

That is why our amendment highlights the need for a joined-up approach and making sure that regional land use planning is at the centre of that. A joined-up approach would mean that we have community land ownership and that people are involved in delivering biodiversity. As several members have said, we are currently failing on biodiversity targets, and that is not good enough. We need to link biodiversity and tackling the nature emergency as part of the key policy framework in the upcoming national planning framework; it is vital that we deliver that as a core policy, not as an add-on.

It is also important that we focus on improving our communities as we improve our biodiversity. Several colleagues have mentioned that, in our urban areas, we need to recognise the importance of involving communities in integrating the biodiversity where they live, through our parks and green spaces and providing more allotments and community gardens. Our local authorities have a crucial role to play in that. It is important that, while we promote biodiversity, we also promote health and wellbeing, access to affordable healthy food and access to safe exercise. All those things are about bringing our communities together by respecting and protecting biodiversity. We need to make sure that the Scottish Government has a leadership role but works in partnership with local authorities and communities to make sure that we are all involved in the process.

I want to thank constituents for their lobbying on the issues of grouse moors, biodiversity and animal welfare. Those issues have to be part of our biodiversity challenge and tackling the nature emergency. I thank the League Against Cruel Sports for its briefing.

We need action now; it is over a year since the Werritty report and we do not have time for further delay. We need to be pushing together to get action. Next year, COP meets in Glasgow, so we should be setting an example as a developed nation with fantastic landscapes, nature and resources; we need to protect and enhance them as part of a strategy to retain and generate new employment. We need to create new jobs that respect nature and give everyone the opportunity for access to jobs while meeting our low-carbon ambitions.

Across the globe, we can see the direct links between nature, biodiversity and climate change. Lives are being lost and economies destroyed because of drought, forest fires and loss of habitats. Virus transmissions are now having an increasing impact on health across the globe, so we need leadership and action on our nature emergency now. Let us call it like it is, let us get going and I hope that Parliament supports Claudia Beamish's amendment.

16:42

Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green): The decline of species, habitats and biodiversity in Scotland is due to a multitude of factors, but human impacts through land use, pollution and habitat destruction have been key. In Scotland, species have been driven to extinction through persecution, habitats have been obliterated through overgrazing, native forests continue to degrade, propped up by public subsidies, and our marine ecosystem is being systematically destroyed. As was revealed earlier this month by

Open Seas in *The Ferret*, a leaked Government report concluded that

“marine habitats in five regions have shrunk between 2011 and 2019.”

The report states:

“The target of no loss ... has not been achieved in the Moray Firth, West Highlands, Outer Hebrides, Argyll and Clyde regions.”

That includes a loss of 10 per cent of the Clyde's maerl beds, 53 per cent of Argyll's flame shells, 27 per cent of Outer Hebrides seagrass and more than 90 per cent of the Highlands' serpulid reefs. The report blames those declines on dredging, trawling, anchoring, overfishing and engineering works as well as climate change, ocean acidification and pollution from fish farms.

The dredging damage in Loch Carron in 2017 was a wake-up call, but ministers have been unwilling to limit the continued damage, even inside marine protected areas. Although the scientific evidence and advice is for action, the Government apparently prefers to sidle up to the vested interests of that damaging industry instead. In the small isles marine protected area, scallop dredging continues even today, six years after designation. What is the point of a protected area if it is going to be carved up to prop up environmentally damaging practices? Remember, the seabed is publicly owned—it belongs to us all.

Efforts to reverse those trends of decline have been compromised by the willingness of Government ministers to cosy up to the industrial shooting, farming and fishing lobby, whose interests have been consistently privileged in policy development. There exists a structural blindness to the long-term elite capture of public policy, but, sometimes, the mask slips. In 2013, at the centenary dinner of the National Farmers Union of Scotland, the then cabinet secretary, Richard Lochhead, stated, without a hint of embarrassment:

“It is an honour to serve as your minister in the Scottish Government.”

He then went on to say that he had the honour of being their representative in Government. However, Mr Lochhead was not the farmers' minister and he was not their representative. That blurring of the subtle but important distinction between agriculture policy delivered in the public interest and the vested interests of producer groups is now so well entrenched that nature's voice is almost never heard, and the trend has been continued by the current cabinet secretary Fergus Ewing, in his own incorrigible style. In 2018, he stated publicly that, to his way of thinking, no industry was more precious than the salmon farming industry, and that he would deal with the industry's detractors.

A nature emergency has been in existence in Scotland's seas and land for decades. It is time to put nature, not vested interests, first.

16:46

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): As we have seen from the First Minister's declaration of a climate emergency, making a bold statement can galvanise policy and indicate commitment to the country. It sends a message of intent and it makes headlines. However, as everyone here knows, it is action that matters. The creation of marine protected areas, peatland restoration programmes and woodland restoration programmes are just three significant actions that have been taken in response to the climate emergency and the biodiversity loss that we recognise.

The RSPB sent us a briefing that calls for a nature recovery plan that prioritises five areas that should form part of a green recovery, and I agree with them all, in principle. The areas are: expanding Scotland's native woodlands; restoring peatlands; tackling deer management; delivering a Scottish nature network; and delivering nature and climate friendly farming. A lot of that is in line with the environmental strategy that the cabinet secretary outlined, and it also echoes recommendations from the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee and the outcomes of the work that the committee has been doing in inquiries and scrutiny over this parliamentary session.

The Scottish Government's multiannual commitment of £250 million to restore peatland is hugely significant in terms of both the world-leading net zero ambitions and tackling the biodiversity crisis that the "State of Nature" report identified last year. That investment and the investment in the forestry grants scheme will not only go a long way to delivering on those aims but will also create nature-based jobs in rural Scotland.

However, sadly, we are set to lose vital dedicated nature funding from the European Union's LIFE programme as the UK exits the EU. Further, as I mentioned in my intervention earlier, we are losing LEADER funding, which many community groups used to drive local programmes that enhance our natural environment and, with it, human wellbeing.

EU LIFE funding was given to Auchnerran farm, a demonstration farm outside Logie Coldstone, in Alexander Burnett's constituency of Aberdeenshire West. The farm is run by the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust and is designed to influence and inform farmers, land managers and

Government about sustainable game and wildlife conservation in the countryside.

We cannot overstate the cumulative impact of the many LEADER-funded smaller programmes that create opportunities for individuals businesses and communities that have supported rural development and environmental protection throughout Scotland. In my constituency, LEADER funding has supported a huge tree-planting operation on the flood plain at Uryside park in Inverurie and funded two green space and biodiversity development officers for the local authority, who create and maintain green spaces across the whole of Aberdeenshire, to increase biodiversity and the types of recreation spaces that are available for residents. LEADER also funded support for farming businesses to diversify and build in resilience, and helped farmers and crofters make their businesses more sustainable, as is the case with the eco-bothies in Newburgh. In other cases, LEADER has supported farmers as they convert areas of the land for activities that promote biodiversity and sequester carbon.

Where is the shared priority fund that the UK Government promised would replace that EU funding? [*Interruption.*] I do not have time; I am in my last minute.

With only seven weeks to go to the end of transition, the silence of the UK Government is extremely worrying.

My final word is on just transition. Last Friday, I represented Scotland on a panel on the green recovery that was hosted by the Bildu party of the Basque Country. My fellow panellists were from Ireland, Sweden, Finland and Denmark, all of which are small EU member states. The other panellists made much mention of the EU's just transition fund, which is worth €100 billion, and the €1 trillion European green deal investment plan. Those are more funds that we do not have access to. Liam McArthur might call it "navel gazing", but I call it our only way back into the EU, which takes green recovery seriously and has money to back it up.

The Presiding Officer: We move to closing speeches.

16:50

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I am pleased to close for Labour in this important debate on the declaration of a nature emergency.

Our amendment calls for the urgent provision of a robust licensing scheme for driven grouse moor management, the phasing out of large-scale peat extraction and the addressing of damaging fishing practices in sensitive marine environments. I agree with Gillian Martin that actions speak louder

than words. That is why it is so baffling that the SNP cannot bring itself to support that approach. It is a sensible approach, which I would have hoped could begin to build consensus for action. As the coalition for grouse moor reform has stated:

“Promoting a widescale change from driven grouse moor management towards sustainable, multiple land uses in a more wooded landscape would make a major contribution to addressing two of the most significant environmental issues of our time: the climate emergency and catastrophic biodiversity loss.”

My colleague Claudia Beamish made the point that we must recognise the need for rapid change, while respecting the challenges that are faced by rural and coastal communities with regard to the urgently needed just transition by providing support for that change as it happens. I would have thought that the Green Party would have recognised that and would have been more willing to work with others so that we can make the rapid changes that are required. An all-or-nothing approach of the kind that the Greens are proposing will end with nothing, but they seem determined to proceed in that way.

Today, the SNP Government has told us that it will respond to the Werritty report soon, but it has been telling us that for months. Why does the Government not just make a decision and bring forward a proposal for a robust licensing scheme? Why is the SNP not willing to recognise the need for a nature emergency to be declared? Our proposals are a commonsense approach that recognises the need for change and displays a willingness to bring it about in a manner that allows the transition to take effect with minimal disruption.

Huge swathes of land in Scotland are managed for grouse, and if land use change is desired, the arguments need to be made to ensure that we bring people with us. Industry figures show that, on average, grouse shooting adds fewer than 3,000 jobs, which have an average salary of £11,500 per year. Therefore, the economic contribution is relatively small in comparison with the value of forestry and tourism to our rural economy.

We should be far more ambitious when it comes to tree planting. Woodlands can provide a range of environmental benefits, including reduced erosion of the soil and the landscape, increased carbon storage, increased biodiversity, improvements in water quality and flow, and resilience to climate change, pests and disease. Tree planting has the knock-on effect of delivering skilled and well-paid jobs in forestry and tourism. Greater ambition on tree planting would bring about a natural transition from land that is managed for grouse to reforested land, with all the previously mentioned benefits that that brings.

In Scotland, we have an abundance of land that could be managed more effectively. Much of Scotland's land is in private hands and is managed for private interests. Increasing community ownership, building on our plans for a greener economy and delivering much-needed jobs in rural communities should surely be our goal. Therefore, I again appeal to members to take the commonsense approach and support the Labour amendment.

16:54

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries)

(Con): Much of my speech repeats and reinforces speeches that have already been made, but I make no apology for that, given the importance of the topic.

Scotland has long traded on its image as a country with a clean and vibrant natural environment. However, while it is green on the outside, it is—sadly—not as healthy as it could be. Species are declining both on land and at sea, and habitats are fragmenting while soils degrade. The Scottish Wildlife Trust has warned that nearly half of the country's species have declined and one in nine is threatened with extinction. It has rightly called for the Scottish Parliament to declare an emergency and reverse the continued deterioration of what is fundamentally our life-support system. That move has been echoed by Scottish Environment LINK, which warns that nature is in crisis, with dramatic declines in wildlife and habitats happening at unprecedented rates.

Last year, as navel-gazing Gillian Martin mentioned, the First Minister acknowledged that

“The challenges facing biodiversity are as important as the challenge of climate change”.

She added:

“I want Scotland to be leading the way in our response.”

What Gillian Martin failed to mention is that, time and time again during the SNP's 13 years in power, it has talked the talk but missed targets and failed to deliver.

In 2017, a report by Scottish Natural Heritage found that the Scottish Government had failed to meet 13 of 20 international biodiversity targets. Under the SNP, 12 species of national conservation importance have been found to be at serious risk, including the Scottish wildcat, the ash tree, the great yellow bumble-bee and the freshwater pearl mussel. The SNP has also broken its promise to designate four new marine protected areas in 2020.

Perhaps it is little wonder that the SNP has not published a biodiversity strategy in seven years, and the same goes for its commitment to publish a

wildlife management strategy. We are still waiting for that.

The Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011 made it imperative for all public bodies to report on their biodiversity compliance, yet only 66 of Scotland's 139 public bodies responded and produced a report for the period 2015 to 2017.

Other environmental shortcomings by the SNP include missing its legal emission targets and ditching its flagship climate change commitment to ban biodegradable landfill waste in Scotland, and all of that while our streets are failing to meet legal standards for clean air. However, hundreds of thousands of jobs depend directly on Scotland's natural environment. Indeed, the sector was estimated to be worth £17.1 billion a year to the Scottish economy in 2008.

The Scottish Conservatives will lodge amendments to the continuity bill to strengthen environmental protection, because there are areas where it needs to be strengthened considerably in order to deliver the results that we want to achieve. One area of concern is the lack of data collection in order that we can accurately see which targets are being met, how they are being achieved and the actual results.

I believe that there needs to be a fit-for-purpose database for biodiversity and natural capital in Scotland. That view is shared by the eminent British economist Professor Dieter Helm, who says that the data should be made available to everybody. He said:

"I would regard that as an essential public good that the state can provide to everybody in society".—[*Official Report, Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee*, 8 September 2020; c 35.]

The Scottish Government needs to spend considerably more than it is spending to make that happen and allow us to move forward positively knowing that our actions are helping species and habitat diversity.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, many rural areas in Scotland have seen a sharp increase in visitor numbers, with people escaping the towns and cities to discover the great outdoors. That is one reason why I believe that it is vital that funding is found to improve the network of countryside rangers, who should be able not only to patrol and protect rural areas, but to help to educate people and allow them to learn more about our wonderful biodiversity.

There is, unfortunately, little time available to me to highlight our precious marine wildlife, although that is an important subject, particularly given the decline in a number of seabed habitats in recent years. However, I must comment on how disappointing it is, given the co-operation that was required to introduce trial satellite tracking on

fishing vessels and the welcome co-operation of our fishermen, that a leaked document from the Scottish Government was used to attack the fishing industry and undermine the trust that is needed. We need all stakeholders, and not just opinion holders, to come together to find the right solutions to protect those vital habitats and fishing grounds for the future.

As with so many policies from this SNP Government, its ability to grandstand and make ambitious, impressive announcements far outweighs its ability to deliver. However, as with our climate, when it comes to biodiversity and our natural environment, it is crucial that we act now to halt any further loss before it is too late, because when it is gone, it is gone.

16:59

The Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment (Mairi Gougeon): I was going to start off by saying that I was grateful to the Greens for lodging their motion and to everyone for their passionate contributions, but it is a shame that a lot of those contributions completely altered the tone of the debate. That was especially the case with Andy Wightman's comments. I will not bother repeating them, but I absolutely refute them. They showed a complete lack of understanding of how we have to work in government in a responsible way.

Maurice Golden: Does the minister agree that ending driven grouse moor management would lead to a decimation of the rural economy and therefore actually threaten biodiversity?

Mairi Gougeon: I think that the member might have referenced this in his speech, but we published research on grouse moors just last week. We will be issuing our response to the Werritty report in due course.

Alison Johnstone talked about mountain hares, which is a case in point. An amendment to the Animals and Wildlife (Penalties, Protections and Powers) (Scotland) Bill was lodged at the 11th hour, with no previous discussion. It had not been raised before and the Government—let alone Parliament—had not had the chance to scrutinise it. The Government and the Parliament agreed, quite rightly, to that amendment, but we were then left with a lot of groundwork to do after the bill was passed. We need to be able to undertake that work if we want a scheme that will work efficiently, properly and well—[*Interruption.*] I am sorry that I cannot take an intervention, but there is so much to cover today, as can be seen from the variety of issues that have been raised in the motion and in members' speeches.

We disagree with elements of the motion that pre-empt decisions that the Government is yet to

announce and those that relate to matters on which a number of pieces of work are under way.

Nobody here is in any doubt about the crisis or the urgency with which it needs to be tackled. We are all absolutely united on that. The Government announced a climate emergency because we recognise, as we have said many times previously, that our climate and biodiversity are intrinsically linked. We cannot consider one in the absence of the other.

Nature-based solutions such as woodland restoration and tree planting, peatland restoration and protection for salt marshes and sea-grass beds will mitigate climate change and flooding and improve water quality and biodiversity. We are already taking bold action to deliver that.

Biodiversity is a priority for this Government in its own right—not just because of the links to climate change. Biological diversity underpins the functioning of the ecosystems that provide the natural benefits that we rely on. Those benefits—from creating and sustaining both the soil in which we grow our food and the insects that we rely on to pollinate our crops, to water purification and carbon sequestration—are fundamental to our survival.

Our existing strategy delivers many projects that contribute to the restoration of biodiversity and, importantly, to ecological connectivity. Many of them are undertaken in partnership with our brilliant nature conservation organisations. I am keen to highlight one of those projects: NatureScot's new species on the edge project, which has been co-produced in partnership with seven of Scotland's nature conservation organisations. It will address the need to focus the right action in the right places, and it will provide £6.2 million over the next five years to protect around 40 of our nationally and internationally vulnerable species.

We continue to deliver our biodiversity strategy and to develop many new measures to address the loss of biodiversity in Scotland. Our 2018 programme for government commitment to a biodiversity challenge fund has awarded £1.8 million since 2019. A further £2 million was committed in the 2019 programme for government, and a further £3 million for biodiversity has been committed for 2021-22. That helps to enable targeted action for priority habitats and species, which will accelerate our efforts to meet international biodiversity commitments.

I want to cover the Werritty report and acknowledge the work of Professor Werritty and the grouse moor management review group, which was mentioned by Alex Rowley and many other members today. I know that there is a frustration at the fact that we are still to issue our

response, but in response to those criticisms and complaints I would say that there was not just one recommendation in that report. There were many recommendations, all with far-reaching implications, which we want to consider fully. That is all in the context of a pandemic, the fact that we have had to take various pieces of legislation through the Parliament, and the fact that we have had to deal with Brexit at the same time.

As we have said, we will deliver our response later in the autumn. That is why I cannot support the Green motion as it is drafted. We commissioned that work and it is important that we are allowed to announce our response to it and our conclusions.

The motion refers to salmon farming. A great amount of work is going on in that regard. Annabelle Ewing talked a lot about that and she outlined the importance of that sector to various communities across Scotland.

We are improving the regulatory processes, based on the application of available evidence and continued enhancements in the scientific base, to provide more benefit to the communities in which aquaculture is based. We carefully considered the recommendations from the parliamentary inquiry, and a range of actions are under way, including through the salmon interactions working group and through the farmed fish health framework. SEPA has launched its new regulatory framework and sector plan for fin fish aquaculture, including measures to improve environmental compliance to ensure that the size of fish farms is better matched to environmental capacity.

We want to lead globally on all those issues, and we have been clear that, in line with most other countries around the world, we think that there is more to be done to improve the condition of biodiversity in Scotland. We are rising to that challenge. We are contributing to international considerations of how best to proceed, and we will respond rapidly when the outcome of those negotiations is clear.

That is why it is frustrating to see the Greens' motion. Like other motions and amendments, there is a lot in it that we can all support, but the Greens have thrown the kitchen sink at the issue, knowing that a lot of that work is under way and knowing about the sheer impossibility right now of meeting the demand for "urgent legislation", for example. I do not think that they sought or expected parliamentary support for their motion. That is what is disappointing about it. We will work with anyone across the chamber who seriously wants to work with us to tackle our climate and biodiversity crisis, but I have to ask whether the Greens can seriously say the same.

17:06

Mark Ruskell: I thank members for their engagement in the debate and for their rapid and strongly emotional contributions on supporting our environment and wanting to declare a nature emergency. However, I am very disappointed that the Scottish Government is attempting to delete from the motion a declaration of a nature emergency. That is despite the fact that the motion was shared with the Government in advance of the debate—as it was shared with all the other parties.

The cabinet secretary said in her opening speech that the motion is “designed to fail”. We reached out to the Government, as we often do with legislation and in debates in the chamber, and we asked it to engage with us. Obviously, it is very disappointing when it does not. I think that that disappointment is shared across the Opposition parties.

Sarah Boyack spoke very well about the urgency of the nature emergency and about how we need not just to agree and declare that there is an emergency, but to agree the basic actions that we need to take to tackle it.

The cabinet secretary talked about the Government’s twin-crises basis; it will deal with climate change and the nature emergency at the same time. However, the reality is that, for climate change, we have climate law in place. We have a legislative underpinning to our action on climate change, we have scrutiny of the Government, we have targets, and we have the UK Committee on Climate Change. We do not have a commitment to a legislative approach when it comes to the nature emergency.

We do not have a legislative approach to setting of targets and the action that is needed. Finlay Carson highlighted that when he reeled off the biodiversity strategies that we have had from successive Scottish Governments over the years. However, they have not been underpinned by legislation, and have been largely ineffective. That is why every Opposition party in the Parliament recognises the importance not just of declaring an emergency but of pinning down the importance of putting into legislation targets and underpinning environmental strategies. That is why they have sought not to delete the first half of the motion. It is disappointing that the SNP aims to delete it, with its amendment.

We need legislation because we need planning and funding to deliver action on targets. Gillian Martin made a point about the situation that we are now in post-Brexit, when there is funding uncertainty.

We need to prioritise nature. Of course there are jobs that we can create in a green new deal. I

applaud the work that the Government has done and its commitment to restoring peatlands and reaping the benefits that can come from that. However, I say to Liz Smith that burning peatlands is not the best way to create a carbon sink. If we are going to restore peatlands and restore biodiversity, we need to make peatlands wet so that they do not burn—so that they are still alive, restore nature and act as an important carbon sink.

Alison Johnstone put things well in relation to the future of the driven grouse industry. Far more people are interested in shooting wildlife on film than in shooting guns, at the moment. The eco-tourism industry is five times bigger than the driven grouse sector. If I thought for one minute that the sector actually wanted to reform and to adopt a licensing regime, there would be a very different conversation. However, the fact is that it has had years to reform, but has done nothing.

The Green Party is fed up with the waiting game. We have waited for marine protected areas to be designated, and we have waited for action on hare protection and for additional powers for the Scottish SPCA. The whole Parliament is still waiting for a response from the Government on the Werritty review, and we are still waiting for the Government to act fully on the recommendations of Parliament’s inquiry into salmon farming. If Annabelle Ewing really cares about jobs in Fife in salmon processing, she should ensure that that industry has a sustainable future and that it is able to continue in the future.

Annabelle Ewing: Will the member take an intervention?

Mark Ruskell: No. I do not have time.

At the moment, the salmon farming industry is threatened with a market ban on exports to the United States, which should be something that concerns Annabelle Ewing as much as it concerns me. This is the danger that Andy Wightman talked about: the more the Government papers over the consensus, and the more that it is captured by the corporate sector and does not balance that with science and the interests of conservation and other stakeholders, the more it stifles progress, change and our ability to tackle and act on the climate emergency.

Parliament will have another opportunity, with the UK Withdrawal from the European Union (Continuity) (Scotland) Bill, to lay out its strong objectives for protecting the environment, and to lay out the environmental principles for a strong watchdog—environmental standards Scotland—that can hold the Government to account.

Although we have been unable to find consensus in the debate, I hope that we can find it when the bill comes to the Environment, Climate

Change and Land Reform Committee next week—certainly among the Opposition parties and maybe even the Government—to make it stronger so that we can protect the environment and act on the nature emergency. That will be the second opportunity; we might have failed today, but we will be back next week.

Business Motions

17:11

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-23403, 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 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: The Supply and Demand for Medicines

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 Ministerial Statement: Rollout of Testing Programme

followed by Scottish Conservative Party Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.40 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 Scottish Government Debate: Making Scotland Equally Safe: Marking the Annual International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Tied Pubs (Scotland)

Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

6.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 1 December 2020

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions

followed by Ministerial Statement: COVID-19

followed by Equalities and Human Rights Committee Debate: Valuing the Third Sector

followed by Public Petitions Committee Debate: Mental Health Support for Young People in Scotland

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

6.40 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 2 December 2020

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Communities and Local Government; Social Security and Older People

followed by Scottish Labour 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 3 December 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: Finance

followed by Stage 2 Proceedings: Scottish Parliament (Assistance for Political Parties) Bill

followed by Final Stage Proceedings: Solicitors in the Supreme Courts of Scotland (Amendment) Bill

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Heat Networks (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.05 pm Decision Time

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-23404, 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 Scottish Parliament (Assistance for Political Parties) Bill at stage 2 be completed by 11 December 2020.—[*Graeme Dey*]

Motion agreed to.

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 23 November 2020, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

17:12

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S5M-23405, on the office of the clerk.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Office of the Clerk be closed on Tuesday 29, Wednesday 30 and Thursday 31 December 2020.—[*Graeme Dey*]

The decision on the motion will be taken at decision time.

Decision Time

17:12

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The first question is, that amendment S5M-23385.3, in the name of John Swinney, which seeks to amend motion S5M-23385, in the name of Ross Greer, on safe schools, 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.

17:13

Meeting suspended.

17:20

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We move to the division on amendment S5M-23385.3. Members may cast their votes now. This will be a one-minute division.

The vote is closed. I encourage all members who were not able to register their vote to let me know by using a point of order, either in person in the chamber or online.

Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): I was not allowed to vote, and my vote would have been yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. Your vote will be added to the voting roll.

Aileen Campbell wishes to make a point of order. Ms Campbell, your vote was registered—you voted.

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)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)

Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 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)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (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)
 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)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (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)
 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)
 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 58, Against 64, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-23385.2, in the name of Jamie Greene, which seeks to amend motion S5M-23385, in the name of Ross Greer, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division. Members may cast their votes now. Again, this will be a one-minute division.

The vote is closed. I ask all members who need to make a point of order because they believe that they have not voted to let me know.

Gil Paterson (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): Presiding Officer, my app froze; it just says that there is no vote currently open. I would have voted no, if given the opportunity.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Paterson. Your vote will be recorded as a no and will be added to the voting roll.

Mike Russell wishes to make a point of order. [*Interruption.*] Wait until your light illuminates, Mr Russell.

Michael Russell (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): Presiding Officer, my app also froze. I would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: I assure you that your vote was recorded, Mr Russell.

I see that Sarah Boyack wants to raise a point of order. I can tell her that her vote was recorded.

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)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (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)
 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)
 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)

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)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 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)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (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)
 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 64, Against 58, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-23385.1, in the name of Iain Gray, which seeks to amend motion S5M-23385, in the name of Ross Greer, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-23385, in the name of Ross Greer, on safe schools, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed. Members who do not believe that they have voted should let me know that they wish to make a point of order.

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): Presiding Officer, I would have abstained in that vote, but my system has frozen.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Adamson. Your vote will be recorded as an abstention in the voting roll.

Elaine Smith wants to make a point of order, but I can confirm that she has voted—her vote was registered.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): Presiding Officer, I would have voted yes, but my screen did not connect at all, so I was unable to vote.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Hamilton. Your vote will be recorded as a yes and will be added to the voting roll.

I see that Aileen Campbell wants to make a point of order. I assure her that she has voted and that her vote was registered.

I will now call the result of the division on motion S5M-23385, in the name of Ross Greer, as amended.

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)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (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)
 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)
 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)

Against

Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)

Abstentions

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)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)

Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 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)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (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)
 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)
 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 64, Against 1, Abstentions 56.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament believes that education is best delivered in the classroom, but that making schools safe for pupils, teachers and staff must be a top priority of government during the pandemic; notes that, as of 10 November 2020, 29,486 pupils and 2,615 staff were absent from Scottish schools for COVID-19-related reasons, with absence rates affecting areas with higher levels of deprivation more; expresses concern regarding reports that some school staff have been instructed to turn off the Protect Scotland app when in school and may have felt under pressure to continue to attend schools even when notified by the app of a potential exposure risk; considers it unacceptable that some clinically vulnerable teachers have felt pressured to return to in-person teaching against specific advice from their GPs to the contrary and in the absence of an overall national strategy on how to deal with school staff with chronic or underlying health conditions; calls on the Scottish Government to work with local authorities to ensure that any vulnerable school staff member who is medically unable to attend school in person without being placed at unacceptable risk is better supported to either work from home or in a safer alternative setting, or, if this is not possible, to potentially be placed on leave without loss of income; expresses disappointment in government efforts to adequately prepare resource levels for COVID-19-related staff absences; calls on the Scottish Government to deliver funding for the purpose of recruiting at least an additional 2,000 full-time teachers to ensure that

all schools can maintain safe staffing levels while managing absences due to COVID-19, and further calls on the Scottish Government to make regular voluntary COVID-19 testing widely available for asymptomatic staff and senior pupils across all of Scotland's schools; notes that participation rates in online learning during the pandemic have been variable across the country, with some pupils and teachers left without access to adequate digital infrastructure or devices to fully facilitate online learning; further notes that, in the absence of nationally co-ordinated online learning materials to support the curriculum, many young people in Scotland missed out on valuable education despite the best efforts and endeavours of their parents and teachers, and calls on the Scottish Government and its agencies to ensure that no child is left behind if required to study from home, as well as investigating the possibility of resourcing improvements to ventilation in the school estate and producing a report based on Test and Protect that examines infection patterns within school settings.

The Presiding Officer: We move to the next question. I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Roseanna Cunningham is agreed to, the amendments in the names of Liz Smith and Claudia Beamish will fall because of pre-emption.

The question is, that amendment S5M-23383.4, in the name of Roseanna Cunningham, which seeks to amend motion S5M-23383, in the name of Mark Ruskell, on the declaration of a nature emergency, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed. I encourage all members who believe that they were not able to vote to let me know, either through a point of order in the chamber or online.

Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Presiding Officer, I got a message that said, "Connection is lost." I voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Dr Allan. I assure you that your vote was recorded.

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)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine 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)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 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)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 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)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Abstentions

Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 85, Against 35, Abstentions 1.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: As the amendment in the name of Roseanna Cunningham has been agreed to, the amendments in the names of Liz Smith and Claudia Beamish fall.

The next question is, that motion S5M-23383, in the name of Mark Ruskell, on the declaration of a nature emergency, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Con)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)

Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 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)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (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)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 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)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)

Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 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)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Green)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Abstentions

Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 87, Against 33, Abstentions 2.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament notes with grave concern the catastrophic collapse in biodiversity globally and in Scotland, with one in nine species threatened with extinction from Scotland, and calls for the continued treatment of climate change and biodiversity loss on a twin-crises basis as set out in the Scottish Government's Environment Strategy; believes that restoring nature should be a central component of recovery; welcomes therefore the Scottish Government's commitment to a green recovery that captures the opportunities of a just transition to net zero, creates good, green jobs and leaves no one behind; further welcomes the advice of the Just Transition Commission and others in this regard; recognises that 34% of Scotland's waters are already covered by MPAs, including the West of Scotland MPA, which is the largest in European waters and is accepted as 'internationally significant' by the Convention on Biological Diversity; further recognises that, while Scotland constitutes only 32% of UK land mass, it accounts for 54% of the UK's nature-specific protected areas; acknowledges the Scottish Government's multi-annual commitment of £250 million to

restore peatland and commends NatureScot for its contribution to restoration via PeatlandACTION; commends the work of Professor Werritty and the Grouse Moor Management Review Group, and expects the Scottish Government's response to this imminently, and notes the Scottish Government's commitment to protect the marine environment and support sustainable growth in fishing and fish farming while maintaining the right balance across Scotland's economic, environmental and social responsibilities.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S5M-23405, in the name of Graeme Dey, on the office of the clerk, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Office of the Clerk be closed on Tuesday 29, Wednesday 30 and Thursday 31 December 2020.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time. We will shortly move on to a members' business debate in the name of Clare Adamson, on pancreatic cancer awareness month 2020. We will first have a short pause to allow ministers and other members to change seats. I encourage all members to be careful to observe social distancing rules, to wear their masks when leaving the chamber and to follow the one-way system.

17:39

Members' business will be published tomorrow, 19 November 2020, as soon as the text is available.

Pancreatic Cancer Awareness Month

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-22629, in the name of Clare Adamson, on pancreatic cancer awareness month 2020. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament notes that November is Pancreatic Cancer Awareness Month and that 19 November 2020 is World Pancreatic Cancer Day; acknowledges that this condition is one of the most aggressive and least survivable forms of cancer, with a five-year survival rate of less than 8% in Scotland; understands that survival rates have remained almost static for the last 50 years; notes that it can affect anyone, but understands that it is subject to multiple inequalities, with different outcomes in relation to diagnosis and treatment and late stage presentation of the condition being more prevalent in older people, ethnic minorities and people living in the most deprived areas; commends all of the pancreatic cancer charities and their dedicated supporters for their tireless efforts to raise awareness of it, and wishes everyone involved with Awareness Month the very best in their endeavours.

17:38

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I thank all my colleagues who have supported the motion and those who will speak in the debate.

I am pleased to say that this is the fourth year that the Parliament has marked pancreatic cancer awareness month. I thank Pancreatic Cancer UK and Pancreatic Cancer Action Scotland for their on-going work and their briefings for the debate.

Since the first debate on the subject in 2017, the tireless efforts of campaigners have assured that this uniquely aggressive form of cancer is higher up the Scottish health agenda. Over the years, I have on occasion been moved to tears by contributions to the debates. I am glad that John Scott has returned to his parliamentary duties. His struggle and the account of his wife's tragic diagnosis and passing was a seminal moment in this chamber.

My interest in the subject was sparked by my parliamentary assistant, Nicki, whose mum died from pancreatic cancer. Nicki is no longer with me but, following her graduation, is working for Pancreatic Cancer Action Scotland in what she tells me is her dream job.

It is a source of great sadness that we cannot have the public engagement that usually accompanies a debate on this subject. I have become accustomed to seeing the gallery filled with activists who are determined to make a

difference for people with pancreatic cancer. It is usually a sea of purple up there.

Pancreatic cancer awareness month takes place each November to raise awareness of the terrible disease and its impact on those who suffer from it and on their loved ones. People are often shocked to hear the statistics that are highlighted as part of the initiative. Pancreatic cancer is one of the least survivable cancers in Scotland. Only one in four people who are diagnosed with pancreatic cancer survive beyond a year, with the five-year survival rate in Scotland at only 5.6 per cent. For context, the average five-year survival rate for the more survivable cancers is 69 per cent. That alone should tell us why we need this debate every year.

Looking back at previous debates, I see that tragedy is a thematic occurrence. However, tonight, there is also hope for the future. Every November, when we speak about pancreatic cancer, we note that survival rates have barely changed in the past 50 years. Those sobering figures throw into sharp relief the need for sustained investment and continued action.

Although pancreatic cancer can affect anyone across Scotland, we are now seeing research that shows that poorer outcomes relate to socioeconomic background, ethnicity and age. This is not just about survival rates; societal inequality is what brought me to politics, and it drives me to tackle the health inequality that is rife among pancreatic cancer patients.

In the most deprived areas, cancer registrations are up to 15 per cent above the average. From that, we can conclude that income and economic activity are key social determinants of health. That is why the reduction of wealth inequality is not only a crucial economic goal but a health necessity and a moral imperative.

Increasing awareness of the underlying symptoms of pancreatic cancer remains a key challenge. It is estimated that 55 per cent of people know almost nothing about the disease, and 73 per cent cannot name one symptom. A powerful new advert from Pancreatic Cancer Action Scotland featured Gavin Oattes emphasising the importance of knowing the symptoms, and I commend Gavin for his bravery. For absolute clarity, and so that it is in the *Official Report*, the symptoms to look for are:

“abdominal pain that can spread to the back,
unexplained weight loss and loss of appetite,
new diabetes without weight gain,
a yellowing of the skin or eyes and itchy skin,
or a change in bowel habits and indigestion which doesn’t respond to treatment”.

However, as I said, this year there is hope and cause for optimism. Scotland has made tremendous strides in recent times. Our country is driving innovation and leading the way with regard to bettering the lives of pancreatic cancer patients. Research initiatives such as the Glasgow cancer tests and the Precision-Panc platform, which is led by Professor Biankin, show that there are pioneering new treatments and precision medicine for people with pancreatic cancer. Precision-Panc seeks to uncover the molecular profile of individuals with pancreatic cancer, ultimately paving the way for patients entering clinical trials by matching their tumour biology to the type of treatment that is appropriate for them. Such ambitious research exemplifies Scotland’s unwavering commitment to a better future for pancreatic cancer patients.

We must emphasise the importance of early diagnosis. For those diagnosed in time for surgery, the five-year survival rate increases by around 30 per cent. With early diagnosis and intervention, lives can be saved and pancreatic cancer patients can have a better quality of life. That is a goal worth striving for.

There is a discernible sea change. Last year, an incredible 100,000 people, nearly one tenth of whom were in Scotland, signed Pancreatic Cancer UK’s petition demanding faster treatment for people with pancreatic cancer. That is key. I know that there has been a great response to the shift in awareness.

Lynda Murray, who has been a tenacious campaigner around pancreatic cancer following the death of her father, William Begley, has doggedly pursued the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport to encourage her to look again at the unique aggressiveness of this disease and recognise the change that is needed in patient pathways in order to give people a chance, because all that she and her family wanted was for her dad to have a chance to beat pancreatic cancer. Lynda Murray sends her heartfelt thanks to the health secretary, Jeane Freeman, for her support in getting the disease on to the agenda and for forming the pancreatic cancer working group. Nearly two years ago, Jeane Freeman met Lynda Murray, Dr Ross Carter and I, and she not only listened, she acted.

We have seen an increase in investment in pancreatic cancer research and recognition of the disease in the cancer strategy update that was published in April 2020 as part of Scotland’s cancer recovery plan. The plan commits to delivering early diagnosis centres across Scotland—which is absolutely key—providing a radical change to the patient’s experience of being tested. People will be able to attend the centre and have multiple tests in one go, saving effort,

resources and, more importantly for these patients, time—time to give them that chance.

In large part, that change is down to the limitless dedication of the campaigners. Policy makers, our health service and the wider cancer research community must now come together. The figures have been static for many years and will not change unless we can do more to improve the reality for people with pancreatic cancer in Scotland today. From pre-diagnosis and at every stage onwards, there are many points at which a patient can be supported by focusing on the whole care pathway. It is my fervent hope that my constituents in Motherwell and Wishaw and people across Scotland will back pancreatic cancer awareness month and will help to transform the lives of people who are affected by this awful disease.

Tomorrow is world pancreatic cancer day. I hope that by this time next year the gallery will be a sea of purple again and we will be able to hear speeches that focus not on stasis but on continued improvement. We want this to be about change. Let us make 2020 the beginning of a decade of change for pancreatic cancer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am delighted to call my friend and colleague John Scott.

17:48

John Scott (Ayr) (Con): I congratulate Clare Adamson on once again securing a debate on pancreatic cancer awareness month, and on her consistent efforts over many years to raise awareness of pancreatic cancer, and I thank her for her kind words.

I declare an interest as one who has had a diagnosis of pancreatic cancer and, thus far, survived.

Being told last year that I had pancreatic cancer and that the survival rate was 6 to 7 per cent was one of the most crushing moments of my life. However, 15 months on, I am still here and, today, I want to bring a message of hope to the debate.

Before I do that, however, I want to thank the many health professionals who have got me to this point: those who first diagnosed my problem; my surgeon, who operated on me for 10 hours; the intensive care unit nurses and other nurses; my consultant, who looked after my chemotherapy; the wonderful nurses who administered my chemotherapy; my general practitioner and his dedicated team in Ayr; my consultant in Ayr and his team, who helped me as I struggled with my diabetes; the Ayrshire Hospice and Ayrshire Cancer Support, which both gave me support; my wife, my family and my many friends, who took me to Glasgow for my chemotherapy; and my

constituents, many of whom gave and sent me messages of support. I also want to thank members and staff of the Parliament, who became my support group over what has been one of the most dramatic times of my life. Of course, I also thank my parliamentary staff, who helped me immensely over the past 16 months; and Brian Whittle and his team, who helped me as well. In part, that is why I want to be upbeat in the debate. The fact is that, even with this diagnosis, all is not lost.

The resources of our health service are amazing, and the kindness and dedication of all those involved in cancer treatment are a tonic in themselves. More than that, treatments for pancreatic cancer are improving, and one of the keys to that is early detection.

The drugs available are also much better than even 10 years ago, with Folfirinox being the UK drug of choice for people like me. However, although that drug has thus far apparently served me well, I understand that pancreatic cancer treatment in the future may move towards targeted immunotherapy drugs, which Clare Adamson alluded to and which are currently in use in America, but are not yet widely used in the UK. In the broadest sense, the next generation of drugs is more patient specific and, as I understand it, offers very real hope for better patient outcomes in the future.

A further area of work that is under research is the heredity aspect of some cancers. Identifying families such as my own, regrettably, that have defective genes that predispose them to certain types of cancers is vital. My family and others suffer from Lynch syndrome, which causes one in every 30 bowel cancers and increases one's susceptibility to almost every other type of cancer as well. It is my view that screening for those with defective genes must be accelerated, and a blood test is often all that is needed to do that. A blood test at birth or in early childhood should become standard practice, particularly for Lynch syndrome, as it would allow targeted monitoring of at-risk patient groups and early treatments; and, ultimately, give better outcomes to people with those and other defective genes and the potential cancers that they may cause.

There are grounds to be optimistic about the prevention and treatment of pancreatic cancer, based on early detection through targeted screening and next-generation drugs becoming available over time. Key to that is, of course, sustaining and developing the skills of our dedicated and brilliant NHS doctors and nurses in these most difficult times and beyond, which I and my party are certainly fully committed to. [Applause.]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you very much, Mr Scott.

17:52

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): It is very difficult to follow that speech from John Scott. As I am sure members will recall, we all mentioned John during last year's debate. It is really good to see him back here and participating in this debate and making that really moving contribution.

I, of course, thank Clare Adamson for bringing the scourge of pancreatic cancer to the attention of the chamber once again. I also spoke in last year's debate, and I have highlighted the issue in the Parliament since 2012. The subject has never been far away from my thoughts, as I lost my mother to the disease in 1985, when she was only 52. That was, of course, some time ago, but it seems like only yesterday to my family.

We know that pancreatic cancer is one the most challenging cancers to diagnose and treat, since it tends to manifest itself late in the day and with relatively mild symptoms at first. I recall from last year that Pancreatic Cancer UK told us that two thirds of people could not even name any of the symptoms. Although I know that Clare Adamson mentioned the symptoms, they are worth repeating to try and help people spot a few of them if there is a potential problem. Pain in the back or stomach area might come and go at first, and it is often worse when a person lies down or after they have eaten. Other symptoms include unexpected and unexplained weight loss, indigestion, changes in bowel habits, and loss of appetite. Obvious signs of jaundice is also a key one for people to look out for, and there are other symptoms as well. Although we must remember that it is by no means certain that a person with those symptoms has the cancer, being aware of what they are might help earlier diagnosis and treatment.

As Clare Adamson mentioned, the five-year survival rate is very low, but there is some light at the end of the tunnel. At the moment, all patients who have pancreatic cancer get the same cocktail of treatment, which gets a good response in only some of them. However, scientists from the University of Glasgow are developing new ways to predict who will respond to drugs that target DNA in a pancreatic cancer. It is basically a precision-and-tailoring method that was not possible before now. The university team working on it under Dr David Chang are hailing it as a major breakthrough in what might be possible for future treatments.

The Precision-Panc programme, which was referred to by my colleague Clare Adamson,

involves a number of initiatives that are under way, and the one that I have highlighted lets clinicians analyse individual cancers in more detail than ever before. The clinical description—which I do not fully understand, but here goes—is that the process uses

“cells grown in the lab ... and mini replicas of patients' tumours ... to identify molecular markers that can predict which tumours will respond to a number of drugs that target damaged DNA.”

That is a clinical description. I do not fully follow it, but that is what I understand it to be.

With the pursuit of a vaccine for Covid bringing the importance of clinical trials to the attention of the whole world, it is good news to hear that clinical trials are to begin in Scotland to help doctors work out who might be responsive to that new approach. Ultimately, the hope is that it helps us to produce new and tailored treatment strategies that, frankly, we did not have available to us before.

Cancer Research UK has made a substantial investment of £10 million into that research—one of its biggest yet—and trials are due to open this month. As I said, there are a number of related trials going on in that programme that are looking at different variants of the cancer to see if we can make further progress in tackling this disease. As far as I understand, more than 300 patients across the UK are involved in this programme of work. All of that is encouraging news, despite an inevitable pause in the work that was caused by the Covid situation.

Pancreatic cancer is one of the most difficult cancers to spot and treat, but with those new trials there is new hope. It is what my family dreamed of and hoped for as far back as 1985. However, with the wonderful work that is going on now comes genuine hope that we might, at last, be able to make some inroads against this difficult cancer.

Once again, congratulations to my colleague Clare Adamson for bringing this issue to the attention of the people of Scotland through this debate. I also welcome back John Scott.

17:57

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I, too, congratulate Clare Adamson on securing this important debate and on the quality and depth of her speech.

Like her, I miss the activists in the public gallery this evening. Hopefully, when we hold this debate next year, we will find our gallery full of the activists who brought so much flavour and dynamism to the debate.

I agree that it is great to see John Scott back in action this evening, and he gave a first-class

speech. Like all members, I am sure, I missed John when he was out of Parliament. We work very closely in the cross-party group on aviation, and I am delighted that he is back with us to speak this evening.

As we have heard, this month is world pancreatic cancer awareness month and tomorrow is world pancreatic cancer day. Across Scotland, specifically in the Highlands and Islands, there will be celebrations. Ness bridge in Inverness, Dingwall town hall and McCaig's tower in Oban will be lit up purple both to remember those who have sadly passed with this horrible disease and to celebrate the lives of those who have survived it.

Pancreatic cancer is one of the deadliest forms of cancer because the symptoms are difficult to spot. The cancer often spreads to other parts of the body before diagnosis. It rarely occurs before the age of 40, but if we look at cases globally, the bulk of them occur in those who are over age 70.

As we have heard, the primary symptoms are jaundice in the skin and eyes as well as unexplained weight loss or loss of appetite. Of course, the inevitable backlog of undiagnosed cancers due to the knock-on impact of the Covid-19 pandemic is deeply concerning. Macmillan Cancer Support, Pancreatic Cancer Action Scotland and others do sterling work and continue to support those going through cancer treatment, but that needs to be supplemented by continued diagnosis, even through the pressures of the pandemic. Pancreatic cancer has only an 8 per cent survival rate outwith the Covid-19 situation, so we need to ensure that symptoms are acted on as early as possible.

I therefore congratulate Pancreatic Cancer Action Scotland on its launch this week of the first TV advertising campaign on the issue, which we heard about from Clare Adamson. It will initially run on STV for two weeks and will highlight the symptoms and provide advice on what to do when individuals have symptoms specifically during the pandemic. Our general practitioners and front-line hospital staff are currently under the most intense pressure, but they would much rather that cancer patients are treated early before it develops in other parts of the body, and that can happen only if patients make contact with the NHS and have screenings and treatment.

Pancreatic Cancer Action Scotland has noted that, of the 22 most common cancers, pancreatic cancer has the lowest five-year survival rate. That is why it is important that we as MSPs continue to do all that we can to ensure that the public is aware of the symptoms and to press for substantial resource allocation to fight this awful disease. I was shocked to learn this week that

pancreatic cancer receives less than 3 per cent of all cancer research funding.

Members have touched on the risk factors, which are well known. They include smoking, obesity and diabetes, but there are other factors that are well known about in Scotland and that have a link with social disadvantage and health inequality. Therefore, the motion is right to say that "older people, ethnic minorities and people living in the most deprived areas"

of our nation suffer disproportionately. We therefore need to ensure that those groups, who are also more vulnerable to Covid-19, are prioritised in awareness-raising efforts.

Diagnoses are usually done by a combination of medical imaging techniques such as ultrasound scanning and PET—positron emission tomography—scanning, and by blood tests and biopsies. I highlight to the minister, who I can see is working actively in the chamber at the moment, that my campaign to have a PET scanner in the Highlands and Islands to fight geographic inequality is important in relation to this debate, and I am sure that he will mention that in winding up.

I will finish with a quote from Carol, who has been mentioned by Pancreatic Cancer UK. She is 49 and she is a survivor. She said:

"I am getting fitter everyday, even though I now have trouble maintaining any weight, but I am determined to live life to the full. I'm hoping to get back to my voluntary work within the next couple of months.

I'm one of the lucky ones, but it shouldn't be down to luck."

Although there is still much to do to beat pancreatic cancer, the ways in which families, communities and charities have supported and continue to support people who are going through treatment brings out the best in who we are—it is about being there for each other in a time of need.

18:03

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I, too, congratulate Clare Adamson on securing more time in the chamber to debate and highlight such an important issue. We debate many topics in the chamber and, too often, we do so from a distant viewpoint, if I can put it that way. However, as has been noted, we have a speaker in today's debate who has walked this path. It makes it all too real when someone we know has had to fight this battle. In this case, of course, it is my friend and colleague John Scott. I remember all too well visiting John during his treatment, and I can say that it was not easy seeing the struggle that he was going through, despite his valiant efforts to hide it.

Each time I visited John, I carried warm messages from members across the chamber. It is fair to say that we were all concerned for his wellbeing, given the particularly aggressive nature of the cancer and the potential prognosis. With that in mind, it gives me real pleasure to be able to speak in the debate alongside John. It just shows what can be achieved with early detection coupled with unlimited stoicism and boundless black humour, which I certainly could not repeat in here, Presiding Officer—I am sure that you are aware that Mr Scott has a command of the vernacular that would not be used in the chamber. He has shown what can be achieved with that sort of positive outlook. Once again, I am happy to say how great it is to see the man himself swinging the bat in the chamber again.

I have a particular interest in the impact of pancreatic cancer on ethnic minority groups, which is mentioned in the motion. A friend of mine happens to be the head consultant urologist and andrologist at King's College hospital, and he wrote his thesis on the subject. I am not in any way claiming to have either read his thesis or understood it, but it highlights research on the impact on different groups, and developing data around that research can only improve the potential prognosis and outcomes for those who are diagnosed.

How we ensure adequate testing and early intervention for Scotland's whole population, irrespective of their background or personal circumstances, must be a priority. Not only that, I push the Scottish Government to promote the need for regular testing. It is not enough to have the testing available—we also need it known that the testing is available and easily accessible, and we must encourage all those who should have the tests to have them. For all cancers, especially pancreatic cancer, early detection greatly increases the survival rate and can reduce the severity of the intervention that is required. As David Stewart noted, there is a report out just now that highlights that the number of people who were diagnosed with cancer in Scotland after lockdown fell by a staggering 40 per cent, which cancer charities are saying could mean more people dying of cancer than would otherwise have been the case. As I am sure the Scottish Government knows, that issue must be considered as Covid-19 restrictions are discussed.

We discuss many conditions, cancer being one of them, and when we do so, I always take the opportunity to highlight the actions that can be taken to help with prevention. For instance, we know that smoking, a bad diet and lack of exercise have a significant impact on the risk of a cancer diagnosis, and there is definitely a socioeconomic divide when such factors are considered. Much good work is being done in the Parliament to

reduce smoking, but there is a huge disparity between those from the most deprived communities and those from the better-off communities. Thirty-four per cent of the lower Scottish index of multiple deprivation communities still smoke, compared with 9 per cent of the highest SIMD communities. Therefore, there is much work still to be done. There are similar findings for addiction, obesity and exercise frequency.

Just as I am getting up a head of steam, I realise that I must conclude. We know where the greatest challenges are, we recognise the importance of a preventative spend on the health of the nation, and all that is required is the political will. Early detection is certainly one element of the solution, but we must be prepared to take bold action to help to prevent a cancer diagnosis in the first place. Improving access to an active, healthy lifestyle may not prevent us from such a diagnosis, but it would certainly stack the cards more in our favour.

18:08

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I welcome the opportunity to speak in this evening's important debate. I congratulate Clare Adamson on securing the debate and for all the work that she has done in Parliament to raise and champion pancreatic cancer awareness. November is pancreatic cancer awareness month, and tomorrow, 19 November, is world pancreatic cancer awareness day.

I also welcome John Scott's return to Parliament and wish him continued good health. I agree with and support John's words of thanks to and recognition of national health service staff. It is interesting to hear from John how a simple screening blood test can help to identify the risk of developing pancreatic cancer.

I will focus my time tonight on raising awareness of the Precision-Panc platform's research, so that health professionals and people who are diagnosed with pancreatic cancer are aware of the specific research that is currently happening across Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom. Precision-Panc brings together expertise from the University of Glasgow, Cancer Research UK, the Beatson Institute for Cancer Research, the CRUK Cambridge institute, the CRUK Manchester institute, the Institute of Cancer Research in London, the University of Oxford and the NHS.

There is excellent evidence that participation in clinical trials is associated with improved outcomes for patients. Early diagnosis is critical so that referral to trials can be made. A poster that I found on the internet, and which Jason Leitch

tweeted yesterday, talks about the symptoms, which are, as others have mentioned, often pretty vague.

My experience as a theatre nurse included supporting surgeons in the extensive and complex surgery for pancreatic cancer, which is called the Whipple procedure—a pancreaticoduodenectomy. It is a very long and complicated procedure that has five-year mortality of 20 per cent to 25 per cent, following it. That indicates that research is critical. We must encourage people to engage in the clinical trials that allow researchers across the country to share expertise and knowledge, and to create and share the infrastructure platform that leads to trials that are quick to set up and to recruit for.

Precision-Panc has a proven track record of delivering positive outcomes in research for pancreatic cancer patients. Precision-Panc has made progress in defining the genetic characteristics of pancreatic cancer, has developed biomarkers of prognosis and response to treatment and has successfully identified why pancreatic cancer is resistant to some drug therapies, thereby allowing for research to be undertaken on new therapies.

Primus-001 is in phase 2; it is a study looking at two different chemotherapy regimes. There are four other current Primus studies—one of which Willie Coffey described extremely well. Research work is so important. I ask the Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing to give a commitment that the Scottish Government will continue to support it.

Finally, I want to highlight an issue that faces my constituents across Galloway in accessing treatment for pancreatic and other cancers. People who live in Galloway—particularly, people in Wigtownshire—are means-tested for travel reimbursement for appointments and treatments. However, patients from across the Highlands and Islands can participate in the Highlands and Islands patient travel scheme, which allows for the costs of 30 miles of travel to be reimbursed for cancer and other medical appointments and treatments. I have raised the issue with the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport previously. Given the challenges of Covid, I again ask the Government to consider the issue. I would appreciate some assurances from the minister that he will look at the issue of cancer travel for patients.

I congratulate Clare Adamson on securing the debate, and I welcome the on-going work to advance the treatment of pancreatic cancer. I look forward to a response from the minister

18:12

Gordon Lindhurst (Lothian) (Con): Anna's annual Burns supper was always an enjoyable occasion: well-attended, good food, fun friends and various well or badly played instruments, accompanied by the signing of traditional Scots songs—equally well or badly. Her house in Currie burst at the seams on such occasions, with her brother Andy's family—his wife, Kirsteen, and their many sons—in attendance. It was her standing joke, for reasons that always eluded me, that I was somehow responsible for seeing that an extension to her house would be built.

Sadly, it was not to be. In February 2018, Anna was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, which she bore with her usual uncomplaining dignity and quiet resolve. We have heard how pancreatic cancer is a deeply unpleasant affliction for anyone to experience. Survival rates are the lowest of all common cancers, and it can be lethally swift. It is a distinctly awful experience for anyone to go through themselves or to see happening to a close friend or loved one.

World pancreatic cancer day tomorrow is a reminder of it to us all. At the end of Anna's life, after NHS care and treatment could help no more, she was moved to the Accord Hospice in Paisley. There, she received exceptional care from dedicated, caring and highly trained people. That is an important reminder of the charities and volunteers who play an invaluable role in caring for the sick and dying, and of the importance and inherent value of every human life—something about which Anna herself, as a committed Christian, was firm in her belief.

Sadly, 70 per cent of people in the UK with pancreatic cancer will never receive any treatment and only a tenth receive surgery.

People who work in public health services should rightly be praised for their efforts on behalf of us all. At the same time, we must not make the mistake of thinking that we have somehow all arrived. Structures and methodologies that provide cancer diagnoses and treatments should be looked at carefully and scientifically to examine where improvements are possible and practicable.

In Scotland, we are told that three fifths of people are diagnosed at a stage that is so late that curative surgery is no longer possible. That must change. Apparently, Scotland has one of the worst five-year survival rates in the concord-3 programme, with a ranking of 35th out of 36 countries with comparable data. Therefore, I am encouraged by the gradual steps that we are taking towards improvement. Indeed, improvements to the cancer recovery plan should help us to focus on less survivable cancers, and to make sure that treatment pathways are cohesive,

sensible and well structured. The creation of early diagnosis centres, which we have heard about, is also something to welcome; I look forward to their being brought into operation.

We need to ensure that those ideas are carried through and, ultimately, that we see new methodologies being reflected in earlier detection, greater awareness of the signs and symptoms that pancreatic cancer confers on people, and much-improved survival rates from it.

Anna, I am sorry that the extension never happened, but you never needed it. Your parties were legendary and we will not forget you.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you very much, Gordon—I mean, Mr Lindhurst. I got too familiar and called you Gordon. I was getting carried away—the speeches are very touching.

18:16

The Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing (Joe FitzPatrick): I, too, thank Clare Adamson for securing this important debate and for her continued dedication to raising awareness about this uniquely aggressive form of cancer.

I am very pleased that John Scott is here to take part in the debate this year, and I thank him for sharing his personal experience. His message of hope is so important—he cannot ever really know just how important—for anyone who goes through the challenge of having that difficult diagnosis, and I thank him for having the courage to stand up and talk about that in our national Parliament.

I also thank the other members who have shared their personal experiences and stories. It is important that people are able to hear from their politicians on such important matters. Debates such as this one are never party political, and it is important that the people of Scotland realise that many of our parliamentarians are speaking with personal understanding of the issues.

Over the past 10 years or so, we have made amazing progress in cancer care. Mortality rates have fallen by around 10 per cent. However, as we have heard from members across the parties, the advances are not equal among all tumour types. For pancreatic cancer, mortality has fallen, but only by 4 per cent during the same period. Critically, it remains, as many others have said, one of the least survivable cancers. Therefore, it is imperative that we continue to work together to improve that.

For world pancreatic cancer day tomorrow, many of us will be wearing purple in solidarity. I am pleased to confirm that, tomorrow, St Andrew's house will again be lit up purple to help raise awareness of pancreatic cancer and as a reminder

to us all how much further we have to go in tackling it.

I must commend the fantastic work of our health service, its staff and our charities for their invaluable work in supporting people with pancreatic cancer. Obviously, my thanks are nothing compared with the thanks that John Scott gave based on his personal experiences. However, it is important that we all remember the huge work that goes on not only in our health service but in the third sector and charity organisations that support this important area. I am impressed with the resilience shown over the recent months and, as we live through the pandemic, we can still reform and redesign our services to further improve patient experience.

John Scott and others highlighted that early diagnosis is critically important to improving the five-year survival rate for pancreatic cancer, which, as Clare Adamson said, remains one of the least survivable cancers. We know that the earlier a cancer is diagnosed, the easier it is to treat and even cure. Therefore, improvement in that area remains a priority for the Scottish Government.

Throughout the pandemic, there have been concerns that the public are staying at home. David Stewart mentioned that people might be staying home with potentially serious symptoms of cancer and other diseases. I am pleased to have heard that cancer referrals are now above the pre-Covid levels. That is very important.

All through the pandemic, we have made it clear that the NHS is open. We launched that campaign on 24 April, and it concluded on the 7th, but we are all aware that the number of cancer referrals throughout the pandemic was way down on where it should have been so, again, it is heartening to see that levels of cancer referrals are now above the pre-Covid levels.

The new cancer recovery plan, on which I will provide more information in a moment, will focus on reducing the inequalities that have been exacerbated by the pandemic and ensure that patients receive treatment equally across Scotland, using a once for Scotland approach. Mr Whittle raised the issue of inequalities. To go slightly off script, I note that Mr Whittle frequently makes the point that, when it comes to the wider causes of cancer, not smoking is just one of the lifestyle choices that we can make to improve our chances. It is important that we keep trying to get those messages out and I appreciate his using some of his time to cover those points.

As Gordon Lindhurst mentioned, we are in the process of developing Scotland's first early cancer diagnostic centres, which will create a person-centred, fast-tracked pathway for patients with symptoms suspicious of cancer. The centres will

focus on patients with non-specific symptoms. We know that, for some cancers, there are very obvious symptoms but, for other cancers, such as pancreatic cancers, there are non-specific or vague but concerning symptoms, so those centres will be important for that range of cancers, where there are no obvious symptoms. The introduction of those centres marks a radical change in how cancer is detected in Scotland; they will provide faster access to specialists, adopt a holistic approach to diagnosis and support the patients with vital one-to-one contact through the process. With the pandemic, the delivery of the ECDCs is timelier than ever.

Alongside that, continued research and investment is vital, and a number of members focused on research. Clare Adamson was the first to raise the Precision-Panc project, which the Scottish Government seed funded. Across Scotland, we can all be proud of that project; it seeks clinical and biological information from individual patients, who are enrolled on to a master protocol, so that they have the best possible chance of accessing clinical trials.

Emma Harper outlined the wider benefits of clinical trials for patient outcomes. John Scott and Willie Coffey talked about some of the research that is being supported by the Precision-Panc project, and the blood test that John Scott mentioned is exactly the sort of innovation that we are keen to consider as we deliver the national cancer recovery plan. The test that he talked about is available in some areas but, if we are having a national plan, we need a once for Scotland approach to make sure that best practice is everywhere. Therefore, I will take a task away to check where that test is available and why it is not more widely available and to make sure that we are looking at it seriously as part of the national plan.

I see that Mr Scott wants to intervene.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Yes, now that he has found his card.

John Scott: The blood test that I was advocating is for Lynch syndrome, but blood tests are available for other familial gene deficiencies. A screening programme to identify those syndromes that predispose people to cancer would be of enormous help to early diagnosis.

Joe FitzPatrick: I thank John Scott for elaborating; that will help me to make sure that I am following it up as fully as I can.

We have talked about the cancer strategy and the cancer recovery plan. Pancreatic cancer has been a priority for the Scottish Government for some time, as can be seen through a number of the actions that are outlined in our cancer strategy refresh, which was published in April this year.

Clare Adamson mentioned some of the points from it.

I am over time, but I will briefly thank all the partner organisations that have worked with Government in bringing together the recovery plan, because it is important that we get it right. The Government cannot do it alone but, working in partnership with all the organisations and clinicians, who do such an amazing job, we can really make a difference.

Again, I thank Clare Adamson for securing today's debate and members for joining such an important discussion this afternoon. I also thank all our partners and NHS staff for continuing to work tirelessly, under extreme pressures, to look after all of us. Without them, none of the work that I have described would be possible.

Meeting closed at 18:26.

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.

Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

All documents are available on
the Scottish Parliament website at:

www.parliament.scot

Information on non-endorsed print suppliers
is available here:

www.parliament.scot/documents

For information on the Scottish Parliament contact
Public Information on:

Telephone: 0131 348 5000

Textphone: 0800 092 7100

Email: sp.info@parliament.scot



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba