



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament (Hybrid)

**Thursday 25 February 2021**

**Session 5**



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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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**Thursday 25 February 2021**

**CONTENTS**

	<b>Col.</b>
<b>FIRST MINISTER'S QUESTION TIME</b> .....	<b>1</b>
Ministerial Code (First Minister's Evidence) .....	2
Scottish Government Handling of Harassment Complaints (Confidentiality) .....	6
Scottish Government Handling of Harassment Complaints (Confidentiality) .....	9
Homelessness (Winter Evictions Ban) .....	10
Tenant Hardship Loan Fund .....	11
Mesh Implant Surgeries (Case Record Review) .....	12
Scottish Courts (Covid-19 Transmission) .....	14
Lifeline Ferry Services (Isle of Barra) .....	15
Princess Alexandra Eye Pavilion .....	15
Breast Cancer Service (Dundee) .....	16
Garden Centres (Reopening) .....	17
Covid-19 (Briefings) .....	18
Places of Worship (Reopening) .....	18
Mesh Removal Procedures (National Health Service Funding) .....	19
NHS Highland (Bullying) .....	19
Discretionary Housing Payments (Low Earners) .....	20
Covid-19 Vaccination (Mobile Testing Unit Staff) .....	21
Quarantine (Offshore Oil and Gas Workers) .....	21
Easing Covid-19 Restrictions .....	22
Travel Restrictions .....	22
Prisons (Face-to-Face Teaching) .....	22
Educational Attainment (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Report) .....	23
Scotch Whisky (United States Tariffs) .....	23
<b>PORTFOLIO QUESTION TIME</b> .....	<b>25</b>
<b>HEALTH AND SPORT</b> .....	<b>25</b>
Health Inequalities .....	25
Child and Adolescent Mental Health (Covid-19) .....	26
Port Glasgow Health Centre .....	28
Covid-19 Vaccine (Hospital Patients) .....	29
Mental Health Services (Demand) .....	29
Mental Health Service (Staffing) .....	31
Elective Surgery (NHS Grampian) .....	32
Mental Health Services (Rural Areas) .....	33
<b>BUDGET (SCOTLAND) (NO 5) BILL: STAGE 1</b> .....	<b>36</b>
<i>Motion moved—[Kate Forbes].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Murdo Fraser].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Jackie Baillie].</i>	
The Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Kate Forbes) .....	36
Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con) .....	39
Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab) .....	42
Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP) .....	45
Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD) .....	47
Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green) .....	49
Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP) .....	50
Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con) .....	52
Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP) .....	54
Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab) .....	56
Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP) .....	58
Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con) .....	59
John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP) .....	61
Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind) .....	63
Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP) .....	64
Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab) .....	65

Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con) .....	68
Kate Forbes .....	70
<b>SCOTTISH INCOME TAX RATE RESOLUTION 2021-22</b> .....	74
<i>Motion moved—[Kate Forbes]—and agreed to.</i>	
The Minister for Trade, Innovation and Public Finance (Ivan McKee) .....	74
Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con).....	78
Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab) .....	81
Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD) .....	82
Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green) .....	84
John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP).....	85
Bill Bowman (North East Scotland) (Con) .....	87
Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP) .....	89
Shona Robison (Dundee City East) (SNP).....	91
Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con) .....	92
Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP) .....	94
Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP) .....	95
James Kelly (Glasgow) (Lab) .....	97
Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con) .....	98
Ivan McKee.....	100
<b>SCOTTISH FISCAL COMMISSION APPOINTMENT</b> .....	107
<i>Motion moved—[Kate Forbes].</i>	
<b>PARLIAMENTARY BUREAU MOTION</b> .....	108
<i>Motion moved—[Graeme Dey].</i>	
<b>DECISION TIME</b> .....	109

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# Scottish Parliament

Thursday 25 February 2021

[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 12:30]

## First Minister's Question Time

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** Good afternoon, colleagues. We begin with First Minister's question time. Before we turn to questions, I invite the First Minister to update the Parliament on the Covid pandemic.

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** Thank you, Presiding Officer. Yesterday, 769 new cases were reported, which was 3.7 per cent of all the tests that were carried out. The total number of cases now stands at 200,406.

Currently, 967 people are in hospital with Covid, which is 51 fewer than yesterday, and 89 people are in intensive care, which is four fewer than yesterday. I regret to report that, in the past 24 hours, a further 31 deaths were registered. That means that the total number of people who have died from Covid under that daily measurement is now 7,084. Again, I want to send my condolences to everyone who has lost a loved one.

Turning to vaccination, I note that 1,515,980 people have now received a first dose, which is an increase of 27,903 since yesterday. The fact that more than 1,500,000 people have now received the first dose of vaccination is, I think, a really significant milestone. We have now given a first dose to almost exactly one third of the adult population, and that includes virtually everyone in the top four clinical priority groups as recommended by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation.

In addition, 85 per cent of 65 to 69-year-olds have now had a first dose. We continue to be on course to complete that group by early March. Subject to supply, we expect to be able to offer first doses to all over 50-year-olds and all adults with an underlying health condition by 15 April.

I confirm that 56,661 people have now received a second dose, which is an increase of 6,540 from yesterday. Significantly, around a third of residents in older people's care homes have already received the second dose. From Monday next week, we will start to publish that figure daily.

Once again, I take the opportunity to record my thanks to everyone who is involved in administering the vaccines and everyone who is coming forward to receive them.

The latest estimate of the reproduction number will be published shortly. We expect it to have remained below 1, but perhaps not very far below 1. That underlines the fact that, although everything is heading in a positive direction, there is still quite limited scope to ease restrictions while avoiding a potential resurgence in cases. That is why we continue to take a careful, step-by-step approach.

Indicative dates for easing restrictions have been given for the next six weeks, because that is the timeframe that we can be most confident about. That approach allows us to monitor the impact of initial changes and it means that we can accelerate the easing should the data support that. We will set out more information as we are able to, over the next few weeks.

For now, as vaccines do their work and as we learn more about controlling the new variant, it is vital that we proceed with caution. I ask people, for now, to stick with the advice and stay at home. It is very difficult, but it is also working. It is allowing the vaccination programme time to do its job and start to take more of the strain of suppressing the virus. I ask people to continue to stay at home and I thank them for doing so.

### Ministerial Code (First Minister's Evidence)

1. **Ruth Davidson (Edinburgh Central) (Con):** Presiding Officer,

"I have nothing to hide on this—nothing whatsoever."—  
[Official Report, 8 October 2020; c 5.]

That is what Nicola Sturgeon said about the Alex Salmond crisis that is engulfing her Government and this Parliament. If she has nothing to hide, will the First Minister publish her evidence to James Hamilton QC over multiple ministerial code breaches?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I have no difficulty with my evidence to James Hamilton being published, but he is currently considering it, and I think that, out of courtesy to him, it is first a matter for him as and when he wants to publish it. I think that, if I were to try to do anything that interrupted the proper investigation and process of that, I would—understandably, perhaps—face criticism.

I have absolutely no difficulty with that being published. If James Hamilton does not publish it when he issues his report—that timescale is, of course, a matter for him—then I would be more than happy to consider publishing it afterwards. What I will not do is seek to interrupt or interfere with the process that he is engaged in.

**Ruth Davidson:** On Monday, the First Minister summoned journalists to her office and challenged Alex Salmond to produce his evidence, only for

the Crown to then demand that sections be censored.

Alex Salmond's evidence states this:

"The First Minister told Parliament ... that she first learned of the complaints against me when I visited her home on 2nd April 2018. That is untrue and is a breach of the ministerial code."

That is one of the sections that the Crown Office intervened on the Parliament to remove, despite the fact that it has been widely published elsewhere. It does not risk identifying complainers, which we all agree is an important safeguard for women who have already been grossly let down by the First Minister's Government. What is it about those two sentences of evidence that is so damaging that they should be censored? Is it just that they are damaging to the First Minister?

**The First Minister:** The fact that Ruth Davidson has stood up and perfectly legitimately recounted that version of events—of course I will give my own account when I appear before the committee next week—demonstrates that all Mr Salmond's allegations and claims about me are in the public domain. They have been widely reported. I have always fully expected to be questioned in detail about all those allegations when I appear before the committee next week. There is nothing, in terms of the publication or non-publication of evidence, that has ever led me to expect anything else. I absolutely expect to be questioned on every aspect of the matter. I will answer those questions fully and to the best of my ability, and people can judge those answers as they see fit.

Scrutiny of me and the Scottish Government—because the Scottish Government has made a mistake in this process—is not just legitimate, it is absolutely necessary. I do not shy away from that. I have waited a long time now to appear before the committee and I am glad that I will finally have that opportunity next week.

Anyone who is suggesting that prosecution decisions or decisions that the Crown Office takes on upholding court orders are in any way politically influenced or politically driven is not just wrong and completely lacking a single shred of evidence to back that claim up, but I suggest that they are signing up to a dangerous and quite deluded conspiracy theory that risks undermining the integrity and well-deserved reputation of Scotland's independent justice system.

Political debate is right and proper. Politics is not and should not be for the faint hearted, but all of us have a duty to conduct these debates in a way that does not unfairly trash the reputation of people who are doing their jobs and doing them independently of the Government.

**Ruth Davidson:** Here is why all the redacted parts of Alex Salmond's evidence are important.

They are exactly the parts that expose the First Minister. Twice on the BBC, she claimed not to know of anything about sexual misconduct claims before April 2018. Three separate times, she told the Parliament that she found out from Alex Salmond himself that month.

She has been desperate to shut down everything about the secret meeting in her office the month before, because it wrecks her whole argument and confirms that she misled the Parliament. The truth is that she knew about the allegations before April 2018. Worse, we now know that she discussed sexual harassment complaints against Alex Salmond with her chief executive, her chief civil servant and her chief of staff in November, four months earlier.

Does the First Minister understand why, to the public, it looks like a cover-up when the exact evidence that has been redacted is the most damaging to her personally?

**The First Minister:** The problem with Ruth Davidson standing up here, recounting all that and suggesting that there is some kind of cover-up is this: every single allegation, claim and assertion that she has just made was included in the written evidence that I submitted to the committee and which has since been published. If memory serves me correctly, I submitted that back in August last year. I have been waiting since then to appear before the committee.

All of that—the meeting on 2 April 2018 and the meeting three days earlier, on 29 March, and the fact that a completely separate matter, a media query, came to the Scottish National Party in November 2017—is not a cover-up. I put that in my written evidence and I submitted it to the committee months ago. People can go on to the Scottish Parliament website right now, if they want, and look at that. It is not a cover-up.

I expect to be fully questioned on all those matters when I sit before the committee—at long last—on Wednesday next week. By my count, that is the sixth date that I have had in my diary to appear before the committee. They have all been postponed up until now by the committee, for reasons that I understand. However, I want to sit in front of that committee, and I want to address all those questions.

As I said earlier, scrutiny of me is important, necessary and entirely legitimate. What is not legitimate is for someone to pursue a conspiracy theory or scorched-earth policy that threatens the reputation and integrity of Scotland's independent justice institutions just because they happen to dislike the Government, and to sacrifice all that, if I may say so, on the altar of the ego of one man.

**Ruth Davidson:** People can see the First Minister's deflection for what it is. Just answer the questions.

This sorry affair is not just tarnishing the First Minister's reputation; it is damaging the institutions that it is her responsibility to uphold. Majority votes by members to produce legal advice have been ignored. Crucial evidence that has been freely available elsewhere has been censored. Promises of openness and transparency have been broken. The chief executive of Scotland's ruling party has been caught calling for the police to be pressured. The reputation of the Scottish Government has been tainted and the standing of the Parliament has been diminished. A culture of secrets and cover-up is only growing, and that is all taking place on Nicola Sturgeon's watch.

There is just one further question that I want to ask. Is the First Minister saving her own skin worth all the damage that she is doing?

**The First Minister:** The most important thing to me is the reputation of our country and the integrity of our institutions. I will always act in a way that protects them.

There is a reputation that is perhaps disintegrating before our eyes—and it is not mine. Ruth Davidson has just gone through a litany of nonsense. She accuses me of deflection. What deflection? In her previous question, she asked me about meetings on 2 April and 29 March 2018, and she accused me of a cover-up. I simply stood here and said that that is a strange cover-up, as I offered the information in published written evidence to the committee. It is hardly a cover-up when I have been waiting for months, with five previously postponed dates, to appear before a committee. I am simply making the point that it is possible, and it used to be possible, in this country to have rigorous and robust scrutiny and political debate without a scorched-earth policy of conspiracy theory and without damaging the integrity of the independent institutions of the country. It is not me doing that—it is me standing up to them.

Ruth Davidson wants to lecture the rest of us about democratic integrity. That is the same Ruth Davidson who is about to depart from this elected institution, dodge an election, and take a seat in the unelected House of Lords, where she will pursue a political career at the taxpayer's expense and never have to ask voters for their permission ever again. I do not think that Ruth Davidson is in a position to lecture anyone about democracy. *[Applause.]*

## Scottish Government Handling of Harassment Complaints (Confidentiality)

2. **Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** There was applause before I even started.

At the heart of the committee that was set up to consider the Scottish Government's handling of harassment complaints are two women who have been failed by the Government. The committee's role is not to investigate the complaints but to understand what went wrong and why the women were failed, so that women can never be let down like that again.

I welcome the First Minister's coming to the committee next week, but it is legitimate to explore some of the issues in the context of the ministerial code investigation that is being led by James Hamilton QC. One such issue concerns meetings that were held with Alex Salmond's former chief of staff. Those meetings were the precursor to the discussion between Alex Salmond and the First Minister. I understand that, astonishingly, the identity of one of the original civil service complainants was revealed to the former chief of staff and then conveyed to Mr Salmond.

That is an extraordinary breach of confidentiality. On whose authority was contact initiated with Mr Salmond's former chief of staff? On whose authority was the name of a complainant revealed? That action was certainly not about protecting the interests of the women involved. Did the First Minister authorise the contact? If not, who did?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I will answer all those questions in detail when I appear before the committee. It seems that Jackie Baillie is standing here, before I have had the opportunity to sit before the committee, and accepting at face value Alex Salmond's account of all this. I do not accept Alex Salmond's account of much of this, which is why, when I sit before the committee, I will go through in detail what actually happened and what did not happen. I think that that is the right and proper way of proceeding.

What I agree with Jackie Baillie on is that there are women at the heart of this—women whom I have been accused of hiding behind, when I am actually seeking to stand up for them. Their voices have been sidelined, their motives have been maligned and they have been accused of being conspirators in the whole process. Not only is that deeply unfair to the women concerned, I think that it is deeply unfair to the efforts—which I think most of us agree with—to create a culture in Scotland whereby women feel that they can come forward with complaints. I want the women to be at the heart of all these discussions.

I say to Jackie Baillie that accepting at face value the conspiracy theories and the account of

the man whom the women accused of harassing them seems to me to be quite a strange way of supporting and standing up for those women.

**Jackie Baillie:** It is appropriate for the First Minister to come before this chamber and answer questions, because this matter, at its core, is about her judgment and her leadership. It is also, absolutely, about the women—the women who were failed by the Government's botched handling of their complaints. Standing up for women takes more than warm words.

A complainant was named. That is not a conspiracy theory—a complainant was named. That is a fundamental breakdown in trust. It is beyond belief that anyone would tell the name of a complainant to the former chief of staff to Alex Salmond, which was then passed on to Mr Salmond. How on earth is that about protecting women? It is a gross breach of confidentiality.

Given the First Minister's comments, in her daily Covid briefing yesterday, about Alex Salmond and his behaviour, why on earth did she repeatedly agree to meetings with him even after she knew about the serious allegations against him? How was that helping the women who had complained?

**The First Minister:** Alex Salmond claimed that the name of a complainant was given. That is not the same thing as accepting that that is the case. Those are exactly the matters, along with many other matters, that I will have the opportunity to get into when I appear before the committee. I will also explain why I met Alex Salmond and, crucially, what I did not do after I met him, which was to seek to intervene in the process or to, in any way, sweep the complaints under the carpet.

I heard Jackie Baillie give an interview some weeks ago—or perhaps it was longer ago than that. I think that it was when my written evidence had been published, in which I had set out that one of the things that Alex Salmond had asked me to do was to intervene to bring about a process of mediation. I declined to do that because I did not think it was appropriate for me to intervene. I heard Jackie Baillie in an interview seem to suggest that I should have done that—that I should have intervened to bring about a process of mediation.

Along the way here, I have faced accusations of collusion with Alex Salmond and of conspiracy against Alex Salmond. I hope that, by the time I get to the committee, the members will have made up their minds which one they are seeking to accuse me of. The fact of the matter is that neither of those things is true. When I became aware of the complaints, I declined to intervene because I thought it was important that a process happened.

For somebody in my position, on hearing what my predecessor, close colleague and friend of 30

years was accused of, perhaps the easier thing to have done—and perhaps what would have been done in days gone by—was to have swept the complaints under the carpet and not allowed them to be properly investigated. I opted not to do that. Whatever difficulties have happened since then, and whatever pain has been caused to lots of people in this process, I do not regret not sweeping the complaints under the carpet, because that was the right thing to do.

**Jackie Baillie:** There is an inconvenient fact here for the First Minister, and it is not what Alex Salmond claims—it is not about the conspiracy. It is the fact that the former chief of staff to Alex Salmond said that, in one of those meetings, the name of one of the civil service complainants was given to him.

**Members:** Allegedly.

**Jackie Baillie:** It is interesting that the more noise there is from the Scottish National Party members, the more I appreciate the difficulties they are in.

**Members:** Allegedly.

**Jackie Baillie:** There we go. It is starting again. However, it is an inconvenient fact and it is extraordinary that that name was revealed.

This week, Scotland's democratic institutions have been exposed in their inability to hold the Government to account. The Crown Office intervened with the Parliament, resulting in evidence being removed—evidence that any one of us can currently access on reputable news websites. We have a Government that has refused to co-operate, denying the committee access to the legal advice that the Government obtained for the judicial review, which cost the taxpayer £600,000. In addition, the rushed-through harassment policy lies on the shelf, gathering dust. It has not been used in the past three years at a time when there are more complaints against Nicola Sturgeon's ministers than there were under her predecessor. We have seen, this week, that there is something rotten at the core of the SNP, and it is poisoning democratic institutions. This is not just about Alex Salmond, and it is not even just about the internal problems of the SNP: this is about the treatment of women in the future. So, what is the First Minister going to do to make it right?

**The First Minister:** What is poisoning our democratic institutions, in my view, is politicians standing up and hurling assertions and accusations without a shred of evidence to back them up. That is something that all of us need to seriously reflect on.

I am not sure when she became the chief spokesperson for Alex Salmond, but it is

interesting that Jackie Baillie stands here, in this chamber, and takes as gospel every claim that Alex Salmond makes. When Alex Salmond was standing here, she did not believe a single word that he said. So, why do we not allow all these claims—Alex Salmond's tomorrow, mine next week—to be properly scrutinised by the committee? Hopefully, it will be able to do that, and then people can make up their own minds.

At the heart of this are women who came forward with complaints—first to the Scottish Government and later to the police, and the police independently investigated all of that. It was right that the Scottish Government put in place a process to allow complaints to be investigated. It was right that, when they came to light, before I knew about them, the Government did not sweep them under the carpet, albeit that the Government made a mistake. When I became aware, it was right, in my view, that I did not collude with Alex Salmond to make them go away or sweep them under the carpet. That may have led to difficulties—it certainly made Alex Salmond very angry with me; I think that that is self-evident—but it was the right thing to do.

Yes, we need to have a rigorous political debate, but, if we are to be a country in which women can come forward, then all of us need to respect the independent institutions, including the highly respected justice system, so that Scotland is a place where the culture says to women: “If you have been harassed, no matter how powerful the person who might have harassed you, you can come forward and your claims will be treated seriously.”

### **Scottish Government Handling of Harassment Complaints (Confidentiality)**

**3. Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** Jackie Baillie has just made a very serious point about the handing over of the name of a complainant to Alex Salmond's former chief of staff. Just to be clear, is the First Minister saying categorically that that did not happen—that the name of a complainant was not passed on to the former chief of staff to Alex Salmond before the meeting on 2 April?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** To the very best of my knowledge, I do not think that that happened.

**Willie Rennie:** What I want to understand is this: following the revelation that that was an allegation, did the First Minister herself investigate the matter to find out the truth as to whether that information was passed on? The lack of such action by the First Minister would be negligence, because there is corroborating evidence that that did happen. Is the First Minister saying that they are lying?

**The First Minister:** It is not my belief that that happened, but a committee process is under way right now and there is a process separate from the committee in which the independent adviser on the ministerial code is looking at all these matters. I am allowing those processes to take their course, which I think is the right and proper way for me to proceed.

### **Homelessness (Winter Evictions Ban)**

**4. Alison Johnstone (Lothian) (Green):** This week, National Records of Scotland revealed that, before the pandemic struck, Scotland had the highest death rate among homeless people in the United Kingdom. As we recover from the pandemic, we must not contemplate going back to the way that things were and to a broken economy that allows too many to fall through the cracks. During the crisis, we have seen unparalleled efforts to tackle rough sleeping, and of course it was pressure from the Greens that led to more support for tenants and the introduction and extension of the winter evictions ban. Now that it is clear that restrictions will continue for months, will the First Minister commit to extending the evictions ban to prevent more people from becoming homeless, and will she commit to making a winter evictions ban a permanent fixture?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** We have already extended the ban on evictions, and we will do that again should it be necessary. It is important that people have protection against eviction, given the circumstances that we are living through.

I have previously had discussions with Alison Johnstone's colleagues Patrick Harvie and Andy Wightman about the concept of a standing ban on evictions over winter months. We have had an open discussion about that. We come at the issue from the same perspective of wanting to reduce evictions and homelessness, but there are differences of opinion about the effectiveness and practicality of such a ban. I think that France is often cited as the country that has a winter ban, and there is evidence there that, once it is lifted and the country goes into spring, evictions spike again. We need to look at the issues properly and in balance and decide what is the best way of protecting people from eviction and homelessness. I am certainly open minded in those discussions.

**Alison Johnstone:** Housing is, of course, a human right, yet homelessness figures show a system that still gives better protections to property investors than it does to vulnerable people. We stand in a rising tide of poverty, which has been exacerbated by the pandemic. Unless we shift our priorities, we will build a recovery that makes things worse, not better. That is why it is

vital that, in this year's budget, we direct support to our communities.

The Scottish Government was on track to miss its child poverty targets even before the pandemic hit, and now the need is even more urgent. Will the First Minister therefore show more ambition to boost household incomes, whether that is by strengthening the social security net, cutting public transport costs, making homes warmer or providing more free meals for children in Scotland now?

**The First Minister:** We are already taking action across most of those issues. For example, it is because of our concern about meeting our child poverty targets that we have introduced the Scottish child payment, which has recently launched and which will start to put money into the pockets of low-income families. In last year's budget process, we had constructive discussions with the Greens on concessionary travel for younger people to reduce the cost of public transport, and we have set out plans for that. From my party's perspective, we have made clear that, if we are re-elected in May, we will introduce free school meals all year round for all young people in primary school.

There is lots of work still to be done—I would be the last to suggest otherwise—but equally, to be fair, the Government has a good record of putting in place policies that tackle poverty and, in particular, child poverty, and I hope that we are in a position to continue that in the next session of Parliament.

### Tenant Hardship Loan Fund

**5. Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP):** To ask the First Minister how much the tenant hardship loan fund has paid out to date to support tenants who are struggling with rent arrears. (S5F-04852)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** We opened the £10 million tenant hardship loan fund on 7 December to offer interest-free loans to support tenants in managing and preventing rent arrears. Of course, the loan is only one part of the support that is available to tenants, and other, perhaps more suitable, options are available, such as housing benefit and discretionary housing payments.

The loan fund is part of wider action to support tenants, alongside extended notice periods, the ban on enforcement action in level 3 and 4 areas, the introduction of private landlord pre-action requirements and increases to discretionary housing payments.

As of 15 February, the loan fund had paid out or offered more than £200,000 to 73 tenants, but I

understand that a further 357 applications are being processed.

**Stuart McMillan:** I have been contacted by a local letting agent on behalf of its clients, who appear to be struggling to access the tenant hardship loan fund. To date, out of numerous applications, only one has had a positive outcome. I have been informed that there are two main issues. The first is the inability to check whether a tenant's application has been accepted or rejected. Secondly, in addition to the inability to follow the progress of an application, when one has been rejected, it is not clear why that is the case.

Does the First Minister agree that the tenant hardship loan fund is an important way to help tenants who are struggling with rent arrears and that, when an application is rejected, an explanation should be given to the tenant outlining why that is the case and they should be signposted to other support services, should that be necessary?

**The First Minister:** I agree with that. That is provided, and it certainly should be. Tenants are given contact details of the loans administrator and a unique application number when they submit an application, so that they can check the progress of their application. A range of information and support is also provided for applicants and, in cases where a loan is turned down, information is supplied on alternative sources of financial support.

I am sorry that Stuart McMillan's constituents have not had successful applications. However, most rejected applications are due to unaffordability, which is why I stress, again, that, although the fund is an important source of additional help, there might be longer-term and more sustainable forms of support that are more suitable for people facing arrears.

### Mesh Implant Surgeries (Case Record Review)

**6. Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con):** To ask the First Minister what the anticipated outcomes and timetable are for the case record review into mesh implant surgeries, which is being led, as moderator, by Professor Alison Britton. (S5F-04844)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** The review is based on a restorative justice model and will give women the opportunity to set out their concerns and have them reviewed by a panel of clinicians in a respectful manner. In each case, the outcome will be determined by expert opinion and consensus and the moderator will meet with each woman to discuss the findings. Clearly, I cannot prejudge what the outcomes will be in each case,

but the review is intended to help the women who take part.

The length of time that the review takes will depend on how many women come forward, but I hope that as many women as possible will be able to benefit.

**Jackson Carlaw:** The review follows directly on from the meeting that the First Minister held at my request with mesh implant survivors in November 2019. Everyone understands that the pandemic has inevitably delayed progress since then, but the hopes and expectations for the review cannot be overstated. It is clear that a resolution of the issue will carry on into a third session of Parliament since the petition was heard in 2013.

Last week, together with Alex Neil and Neil Findlay, I met with Professor Britton and campaigners. Professor Britton shares concerns regarding the terms of reference, such as the concern about the seeming ability to amend patient records without reference, and I understand that, if she has not already done so, she intends to propose variations.

At the same time, Dr Wael Agur—the clinician who most inspires the confidence of the mesh women and who originally declined to participate in the review because of his own reservations regarding the terms of reference—has intimated that, were the terms of reference to be amended as Professor Britton and the survivors hope, he would now agree to participate in the review.

Amending the terms of reference and having Doctor Agur joining the review team would, more than anything else, secure the support and confidence of all those women. We cannot let them down again. Will the First Minister commit to making both things happen?

**The First Minister:** I do not know whether Professor Britton has raised her concerns about the remit with the Scottish Government yet—I see that the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport is indicating that she has not done so. Of course, she is perfectly free to do so, and we will take any suggestions that she makes very seriously. Obviously, without knowing in detail what amendments she wants to the terms of reference, I cannot stand here and give a commitment to agree. However, given her position, we will listen seriously to what she says.

Doctor Agur was asked to be part of the review but he declined. If that were to change or if the reasons for his declining previously were to change and he was willing to reconsider, we would also be open to that.

## Scottish Courts (Covid-19 Transmission)

**7. Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister how the risk of Covid-19 transmission within Scottish courts is being mitigated, in light of the increase in prisoners testing positive within the prison estate. (S5F-04848)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** The Government has provided funding to help to protect the safety and wellbeing of everyone coming to a court. We provided funding for remote High Court and sheriff court jury centres to help restore pre-Covid core capacity and funding to develop core technology.

Obviously, how all of that works in practice is an operational matter for the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service. Extensive risk assessments have taken place in all buildings, with guidance for staff and court users regularly updated to reflect the latest public health advice.

No accused person who has tested positive, has symptoms or is self-isolating is brought to court. The emergency coronavirus legislation allows accused persons to be excused from attending procedural court hearings, and it allows trial time limits to be extended where necessary. Any accused person with Covid concerns appearing from police custody joins the court custody hearing by videolink from the police custody unit.

**Rhoda Grant:** The First Minister will be aware of concerns from solicitors regarding unsafe working conditions in courts. A number of them have caught Covid-19 and have passed it on to loved ones at home. The outbreaks in prisons and the huge increase in the number of prisoners having to self-isolate will only heighten solicitors' concerns. Understandably, some solicitors are now refusing to meet clients in their cells, because it is unsafe. They need to protect themselves and their loved ones.

We already have huge backlogs in our courts, and the situation is creating further delays. What is the First Minister doing to investigate how those infections in the court and prison systems have occurred, and what is she doing to ensure that courts and prisons are safe?

**The First Minister:** Safety is paramount. Earlier this week, I discussed the recent outbreaks in prisons with the chief medical officer. One of the concerns about the new variant of Covid—it is a concern that is being monitored, and I would not say that there is a definitive understanding of the situation yet—is its rapid spread within institutional settings. That appears to be an issue of concern in prisons now, and it is under on-going review.

The safety of people who attend court settings and the safety of lawyers visiting prisoners in

prison must of course be taken very seriously by the Scottish Prison Service and the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service, which is why some of the steps that I outlined are so important. They must keep up with the latest public health advice to ensure that the risks of transmission are minimised.

My final point applies to outbreaks wherever they occur. At the heart of the matter is the on-going necessity to suppress the virus and keep it at as low a level as possible. Avoiding the virus getting into institutions and spreading to different places will take all of us. That is why the cautious approach that we are taking remains so important.

**The Presiding Officer:** We come now to supplementary questions.

#### **Lifeline Ferry Services (Isle of Barra)**

**Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP):** At the weekend, I spoke to constituents from the Isle of Barra, who had had only one ferry from the mainland in the previous 10 days, which meant that perishable essentials such as bread and milk were several days old on arrival, having travelled on a convoluted route via other islands. The islanders faced a similar situation last winter, due to a lack of resilience in the ferry fleet during the winter refit season. What action can now be taken, such as potentially chartering additional vessels, to ensure that residents in Barra and elsewhere do not face such levels of disruption to lifeline services in future?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I certainly acknowledge the frustration of customers during periods of disruption, and we are firmly committed to supporting lifeline services. The decision to delay or cancel a sailing is never taken lightly, as the operator always recognises the importance of the ferry services to island and remote mainland communities.

The recent prolonged severe weather caused a lot of disruption to sailings, and the situation has been compounded by technical issues. The operator has taken a number of actions to continue to support the lifeline services. Those have included moving the MV Hebrides to cover Oban-based services in order to provide lifeline services to Coll, Tiree and Barra, and moving the MV Lord of the Isles north.

I will ask the Minister for Energy, Connectivity and the Islands to provide the member with more information, but I give an assurance that we understand the importance of those issues.

#### **Princess Alexandra Eye Pavilion**

**Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con):** This week, Dr Hector Chawla, the former director of the Princess

Alexandra eye hospital here in Edinburgh, said that

“the Scottish Government’s withdrawal of support for the proposed replacement ... appeared to be driven by saving money rather than any new concept of care”

for eye patients in Edinburgh. He described the Scottish National Party’s cuts to NHS Lothian as an act of “vandalism”.

Dr Chawla has warned that

“expecting people to travel long distances for treatment would mean”

worse outcomes, with

“more people risking blindness.”

Does the First Minister believe that it would be acceptable for Scotland’s capital to lose specialist eye services and for Edinburgh to become one of only a few cities across the United Kingdom not to have an eye hospital? Will she think again? On behalf of the people I represent in Edinburgh, I say that this cannot happen, and it must be an election issue if the Government will not think again on this key matter.

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** This is a really important issue. Somebody in my family is dependent on eye services in Edinburgh, and has been for a long time, so I know how important those services are. It is not the case that the Scottish Government has withdrawn support. We have asked NHS Lothian to examine the proposal again and we will continue to discuss with it how we can move forward sensibly.

It is of course important that Edinburgh has fit-for-purpose, state-of-the-art eye care services for people who need them, and that is what we are committed to working with NHS Lothian to ensure.

#### **Breast Cancer Service (Dundee)**

**Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):** I asked the chief executive of NHS Tayside this past week at the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee whether he could guarantee the long-term future of the breast cancer service in Ninewells hospital. He said that he could not. My fear, and that of oncologists—whom world-leading cancer centres are now re-employing—is that women in Dundee will not travel to Edinburgh or Aberdeen for breast cancer treatment; if they cannot get treatment in Dundee, they will go untreated.

The demise of that service started with a prescribing query, then a ream of Government whitewash reports that took the official line despite scientific evidence to the contrary. Now, women in Dundee might not get the cancer treatment that they need. Will the First Minister commit to a long-term future for a breast cancer service in Dundee?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I certainly want to see breast cancer services have the long-term future that I am sure that everybody in Dundee wants to see. I am happy to look into the reasons behind the statement of the NHS Tayside chief executive to understand their basis and to reply to the member in more detail. I want to be clear: it would not be acceptable or appropriate for the women in Tayside to have to travel long distances for essential breast cancer support and care. If Jenny Marra forgives me, I will get further detail on the issue and come back to her as soon as possible.

#### **Garden Centres (Reopening)**

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** As we know, spring is in the offing and thoughts turn to gardening, which is good for the soul in these tough times—I declare an interest in that regard. Although one can buy plants and gardening equipment in B & Q and supermarkets, garden centres—most of which are mainly outdoors premises—are restricted to click and collect, which the Horticultural Trades Association has claimed has provided only 3 per cent of the usual turnover. This is an important time of the year for them. Will the Scottish Government revisit the matter? It does not appear to be a level playing field—a situation that impacts not only on small local garden centres but on all the local growers who provide seasonal stock.

**Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow Southside) (SNP):** I am not sure that my soul is yet quite so troubled as to require me to take to the garden. My apologies to gardeners and horticulturists—Roseanna Cunningham is about to get me into trouble; I know how important the subject is and will move on before I get myself into deeper trouble.

I know how important gardens are to all of us—including me—and how important the spring and summer period is to the industry. Limiting many garden centres to online sales and collection was a really difficult decision that we had to take to ensure that we suppressed the new, more transmissible strain of the virus. We have not taken the approach of prohibiting sales of particular items in essential stores—it is up to the individual retailer to decide that, provided that they operate within the guidelines. Garden centres remain open in tier 3 areas and, as I set out this week, I am hopeful that we will be able to see a phased but significant reopening of the economy in April, which would include the opening of non-essential retailers.

I reassure people—in case anybody got the wrong impression from the light-hearted start of

that answer—that gardens and garden centres are really important to everybody across the country.

**Christine Grahame:** Thank you for that.

#### **Covid-19 (Briefings)**

**Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con):** A key recommendation in the report that the citizens assembly produced this past week is that it should be health experts, not politicians, who lead the daily Covid briefings that the Scottish Government holds. Does the First Minister accept that recommendation?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I struggle to work out what the Tories want. On one hand, they always tell me to concentrate on Covid—concentrate on the day job. On the other hand, they tell me to stop doing daily briefings to give the people of Scotland the information that they need.

I do not know whether that is what the Tories think I should do. Equally, is that what they think Boris Johnson should do? Last night, I saw the United Kingdom Government Secretary of State for Education lead a briefing. I have also seen the UK Government Secretary of State for Health and Social Care do so, and Boris Johnson does it regularly.

In a public health crisis, it is important that people get politicians who stand up, take responsibility and are accountable, and that those politicians are joined by public health experts who add important information. We are going into an election period, and I take very seriously my responsibility to ensure that the election is conducted properly and fairly. That will have implications for how we proceed with the Covid briefings during that period.

#### **Places of Worship (Reopening)**

**Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab):** In Parliament on Tuesday, the First Minister said that she hoped that communal worship would restart on 5 April, which is the day after Easter Sunday. However, she went on to suggest that it could happen a few days earlier, possibly in time for important religious festivals such as Passover and Easter Sunday, which is the greatest Christian feast day.

If the First Minister will not allow the immediate reopening of places of worship to give Scottish Christians and members of other faiths equality with those in the rest of the United Kingdom, will she at least confirm on what date she intends to allow places of worship to reopen, and whether she will base access on the size of a church or other premises, rather than on an arbitrary number of 20 people? Will she also confirm that

meaningful discussions are taking place with religious leaders on the matter?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** Yes, constructive discussions are taking place. On Tuesday, I said that I recognise that 5 April falls just after Easter and Passover, and that we would take account of that. Assuming that that phase of reopening can start, it would absolutely be the intention to allow places of worship to open in time for the full Easter weekend. On the question of discussions with faith leaders, later on Tuesday afternoon, I had discussions with the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, and confirmed that to him.

In terms of the restrictions on numbers, we will need to carefully consider the state of the virus, because it is about keeping people safe. We want people to be able to go to churches to worship, but we want them to be safe from Covid as well. If we are able to start that phase of reopening, we will ensure that it happens for places of worship in time for those important religious festivals.

#### **Mesh Removal Procedures (National Health Service Funding)**

**Alex Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP):** Further to Jackson Carlaw's question about the Britton review on mesh records, will the First Minister undertake that waiting for the results of that review will not in any way hold up a decision on national health service funding for women who need urgent mesh removal procedures to be undertaken by Dr Veronikis in the USA?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I certainly undertake that we will not hold up any urgent treatment, or funding for urgent treatment, that any woman needs because we are waiting for the results of a review. The issues around getting access to Dr Veronikis in America, or his coming here, are longstanding, and there may be a variety of ways in which we need to support women. However, we will not hold up making appropriate decisions for women in order to wait for the conclusion of a review.

#### **NHS Highland (Bullying)**

**Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** All those affected by bullying in NHS Highland feel cheated that the Parliament has not found the time that was promised to debate the Sturrock report. I am still being contacted by former and current members of NHS Highland, who are asking how they register for the healing process.

Does the First Minister agree that tomorrow's deadline for registering should be extended to ensure that no one who has suffered bullying and harassment in NHS Highland is excluded?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** Given that the deadline is tomorrow, I am happy to look into the matter urgently, as I would not want anybody to be excluded. Mr Mountain should take it from that that I am broadly sympathetic to what he has said, although I will need to check the detail. I am looking at the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport, who is indicating that she has undertaken to give a further update before Parliament stops for the election.

If the Parliamentary Bureau wants there to be a debate, and time can be found for it, I certainly cannot see a reason why that should not happen. It is right that that should come from Government, but I say simply as a matter of fact that Opposition parties have time in which they can choose what is debated in the Parliament.

I will ask the Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans, Graeme Dey, to discuss with business managers whether there is an appetite for such a debate and time remaining in the schedule to allow it to take place.

#### **Discretionary Housing Payments (Low Earners)**

**Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab):** The Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that the incomes of 45 per cent of those living in the private rented sector had dropped, and that 58 per cent had borrowed or had used up their savings. In a month's time, renters will face eviction, as protections end.

With those figures in mind, will the Scottish Government extend eligibility for discretionary housing payments to low earners and not just to those on benefits? Alternatively, will it consider providing grants rather than loans for those whose need is most acute? Many people may not have the means to repay those loans, and we can see the obvious consequences of that in the short and longer terms, in that more people might face eviction if we do not act now.

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I will consider all those things. I have already covered some of that in my responses to Alison Johnstone and Stuart McMillan, about the tenant hardship loan fund. I made the point that not everybody is able to take out a loan and repay it, so other sustainable ways in which people can have support are needed. The discretionary housing payment is one of those ways. We look often at the quantum of support that is available through discretionary housing payments, so I will certainly take away the request to look at eligibility.

We are very serious about seeking to help people who are in that position. There is a range of ways in which we already do that, but if we can find and implement additional ways, we will certainly do so.

### **Covid-19 Vaccination (Mobile Testing Unit Staff)**

**Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP):** The mobile testing units in Dumfries and Galloway have been doing an excellent job under difficult circumstances. However, I have been approached by a constituent who works in one who has told me that they are not classified as a front-line health worker and so are not in a priority group for the vaccine. Given that those workers—albeit with full personal protective equipment—are close to infectious people, does the First Minister believe that the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation has perhaps not got that quite right?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** No—I think that the JCVI has got things broadly right, and we accept its recommendations. However, I agree with Joan McAlpine that we have to look at the broad categories to see whether there should be additions based on people's circumstances.

Earlier this week, I think—on an issue that Joan McAlpine has raised before—we took the decision to add people with mild or moderate learning disabilities to cohort 6. The question is on a similar issue. Obviously, we hugely value the Scottish Ambulance Service's contribution at the front line of the response to the pandemic, including in Dumfries and Galloway.

Staff at symptomatic test sites are regularly in the vicinity of people who have Covid, so we have taken the decision to include the symptomatic test site staff in the JCVI classification of front-line health and social care workers. I confirm that those workers will shortly receive invitations to be vaccinated.

### **Quarantine (Offshore Oil and Gas Workers)**

**Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** Last week, I asked the First Minister to consider whether offshore workers returning from overseas could quarantine at home, in order to avoid spending—as in one case that was reported to me—up to 75 per cent of their salary, and 10 of their 14 days of field break, in a hotel.

This morning, it was announced that certain workers returning from installations in the North Sea will potentially be able to stay in their own homes. Will the First Minister confirm the rules for oil and gas workers who are returning from overseas? Will they still be required to quarantine in a hotel and, if so, is there any prospect of a further review in the near future that would permit self-isolation at home?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** We review that on an on-going basis. We will always keep arguments and changing evidence under consideration. On Liam Kerr's particular question, I will write to him as soon as possible. I want to

make sure that I know exactly where we have got to in consideration of oil and gas workers before I confirm it in the chamber, and I will try to get that information to him as quickly as I can.

### **Easing Covid-19 Restrictions**

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** The Scottish Government's cautious approach to Covid has been very successful, and I very much welcome it. If we continue to make good progress, as we have been doing, is it possible that restrictions could be eased more quickly?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** Yes—of course. We have an obligation under the coronavirus legislation to assess the on-going necessity and proportionality of the restrictions that are in place. We do that routinely, every time that we consider lifting or imposing restrictions. That is encapsulated in the four-harms assessment that I regularly talk about.

We have set out—rightly, I think—a cautious and careful step-by-step approach; however, if the data allows it, we will go more quickly. Nobody wants us to be living with the restrictions for a moment longer than necessary, so let us all keep that downward pressure on the virus while the vaccination programme continues to do its work. I hope very much that we will be out at the other end of this, perhaps sooner than any of us are thinking might be the case right now.

### **Travel Restrictions**

**Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):** Can the First Minister tell me when I will be able to visit my mother in Cumbria and when she will be allowed to visit me?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I cannot tell Graham Simpson that right now, but I desperately wish that I could. I absolutely understand how desperately difficult it is for people to be unable to see and hug and interact normally with loved ones. I appreciate that the member's relatives are on the English side of the England-Scotland border, but many people in Scotland are in the same situation; I cannot visit my mum and dad, because they live in a different local authority area.

We all understand the situation and want the restrictions to be lifted as quickly as possible, but if I were to give a date right now, I would not be doing so based on any assessment that I could properly back up. I hope to be in a position to do that soon; I will do it as soon as possible.

### **Prisons (Face-to-Face Teaching)**

**Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):** The First Minister mentioned earlier the rapid spread of

Covid in prisons. What guidance has been issued to lecturing staff on the return to face-to-face teaching in the Scottish Prison Service to ensure their health and safety?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** Education provision is essential for rehabilitation. The Scottish Prison Service has a contract with Fife College to provide education services. Those services were suspended following the decision by Fife College to furlough staff from 18 January to 12 February this year, but have now resumed in all establishments except HMP Dumfries and HMP Greenock. All those who work in prisons are required to follow the Scottish Prison Service's pandemic plan and are subject to health and safety assessment.

More generally, we published temporary lockdown guidance for colleges, universities and student accommodation that applies to on-campus and off-campus activity. The guidance states that institutions should

"ensure that only those staff who are required to support essential activities are requested to attend in person, and for no longer than is necessary."

#### **Educational Attainment (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Report)**

**Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con):** Last week, the Parliament asked the Government to urgently release the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report into Scottish education, which is currently sitting on ministers' desks. This week's worrying attainment figures perfectly illustrate why it is vital that Parliament has a chance to scrutinise those findings before dissolution. I simply ask the First Minister whether the report will be released any time soon.

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** The OECD has not completed its work and has not completed its report. I understand that the OECD will be engaging over the coming period with stakeholders, and will be able to update them on any conclusions that it has reached so far. As I think I said in the chamber last week, the OECD is in charge of the process and timescale of that work. I am pretty sure that if the Government were to seek to intervene in that work, to truncate the timescales or to be seen to dictate to the OECD how it goes about its work, the Conservatives would be among the first to get to their feet to criticise us for doing so.

#### **Scotch Whisky (United States Tariffs)**

**Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP):** This month we heard that Scotch whisky exports had decreased by £1 billion in 2020, which

was a drop of 23 per cent. That is due partly to the pandemic, but a significant part is due to the 25 per cent United States Government tariff on single malt whisky that continues to damage the industry. Can the First Minister update members, in relation to the United Kingdom budget next week, on what action the Scottish Government is taking to support removal of the tariff and what support it has given to the whisky industry?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** That is an important issue. We will continue to fight for a resolution to it for our whisky industry, including through representations that we make in relation to the budget. Not only the whisky industry but other sectors, including cashmere clothing, have suffered since the US tariffs were imposed over a year ago. They are causing significant economic harm that has been estimated at £500 million of losses, and that is growing. The UK Government has so far failed to achieve anything meaningful, despite regular public statements on the issue, but we will continue to press to have the tariffs lifted. The jobs, livelihoods and businesses that are affected by them matter deeply to Scotland and should matter deeply to all of us.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you very much. That concludes First Minister's question time.

13:29

*Meeting suspended.*

14:30

*On resuming—*

## Portfolio Question Time

### Health and Sport

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Linda Fabiani):** Good afternoon, everyone. I remind all members that social distancing measures are in place in the chamber and that masks should be worn on entering and leaving or when wandering about. The first item of business is portfolio questions.

#### Health Inequalities

**1. Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to reduce health inequalities. (S5O-05057)

**The Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing (Mairi Gougeon):** Reducing health inequalities is a clear priority for the Scottish Government and among the biggest challenges that we face. Our programme for government in 2020 set out our commitment to promote lifelong health and wellbeing, and that included a renewed focus on tackling health inequalities.

We are taking decisive action to address inequalities by making progress against our public health priorities and associated healthy living strategies, and against our action plans on smoking, obesity, physical activity, and alcohol and drug misuse, which were published in 2018. We are also working closely with Public Health Scotland and other key partners to support and empower our communities to make the changes that are important to them.

Ultimately, right across Government, we are focusing our efforts on addressing the underlying causes of health inequalities—for example, on ending poverty, promoting fair wages, and improving our physical and social environments. Those are complex issues, which is why our public health efforts are complemented by wide-ranging, cross-Government action. Reducing poverty and inequality sits at the heart of our investment across all portfolios.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I should have reminded members that, if they wish to ask a supplementary question, they should press their request-to-speak button or, if they are remote, put R in the chat box during the question. I am sorry to have held up Mr Arthur.

**Tom Arthur:** The pandemic has exacerbated existing health inequalities, but it has also created new health inequalities, with variations among regions that depend on their success in reducing the prevalence of the virus. As we move towards a

levels system, can the minister assure members that the Scottish Government will provide resources to areas that need extra support in reducing the prevalence of the virus?

**Mairi Gougeon:** I share Tom Arthur's concern about that—especially the concern that there are groups of people who have been adversely and disproportionately affected by Covid-19. The economic consequences of the pandemic are likely to have a negative long-term impact on health and to exacerbate the inequalities that already existed.

As I stated in my first response, we take those issues extremely seriously. That is why, since the start of the pandemic, we have committed over £0.5 billion of additional funding to support people and communities that have been impacted. That includes over £140 million specifically to tackle issues such as food security. It also includes the £15 million that the First Minister announced in November for local authorities to support people who had been impacted by level 4 restrictions and guidance. In addition, we have committed £479 million of Covid consequential funding to local authorities to try to meet local needs and build resilience.

Last week, we announced a package of measures worth £37.2 million to tackle poverty and inequality. That includes a further £100 Covid hardship payment for qualifying low-income families and additional funding of £20 million for councils to tackle financial insecurity at a local level. That means that almost £47 million has been made available for that priority.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I remind everyone that I will not be able to take supplementaries if questions and answers are very long.

#### Child and Adolescent Mental Health (Covid-19)

**2. Shona Robison (Dundee City East) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to measure and mitigate the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on child and adolescent mental health. (S5O-05058)

**The Minister for Mental Health (Clare Haughey):** We have invested significantly in additional mental health support for children and young people during the pandemic. We also continue to monitor surveys, research and referral rates to provide us with an understanding of how children and young people are feeling during the coronavirus pandemic to ensure that the right help and support are available.

In November, we announced an additional £15 million to respond to children and young people's mental health issues, building on our previous investment and commitments. Of that amount,

£11.25 million is dedicated to services that respond to the pandemic. The remaining £3.75 million will fund new and enhanced community mental health and wellbeing services for five to 24-year-olds. I know that the member will have been pleased to see that £445,000 of that funding was allocated to Dundee to provide new services that focus on prevention, early intervention and the treatment of distress.

In addition, last week we announced £120 million for a mental health recovery and renewal fund. The fund will ensure delivery of the mental health transition and recovery plan, including by prioritising work to improve specialist CAMH services, address long waiting times and improve other mental health supports and services for children and young people.

We continue to prioritise support for mental health and wellbeing in schools and education through actions such as the mental health in schools working group and counselling in schools. We have also invested in a range of other measures to support young people, including digital resources on mental health and wellbeing that are available via YoungScot's website and social media.

**Shona Robison:** I thank the minister for that comprehensive reply. Can she say more about how CAMH services will be supported during the recovery phase, particularly in relation to waiting times? How will progress that has been made in response to the independent inquiry into Tayside mental health services be maintained? Will the timing of the progress report, which was initially scheduled to come out in February, be affected by the pandemic?

**Clare Haughey:** The transition and recovery plan takes a number of actions to progress improvement on access to CAMHS and psychological therapies. Those actions include the implementation of our CAMH service specification and provision of payload improvement support for the seven national health service boards with the longest wait times. That will help to clearly identify the challenges in those service areas and solutions to address unacceptable long waits. We are working with mental health leads on those boards to support the development and implementation of local recovery plans by the end of March 2021 and to target investment to improve access to CAMHS.

Since the independent inquiry into mental health services in Tayside report was published last year, I have been engaging closely with Tayside's executive leadership to help prioritise improving mental health throughout the pandemic. That is demonstrated by the fact that today NHS Tayside launched its mental health strategy, living life well. I am pleased to see that the strategy has been

endorsed by those with lived experience, service managers and others in the community. The implementation of the strategy is an important step in Tayside's improvement journey for mental health support and services.

The next significant step will be the outcome of Dr David Strang's review of Tayside's progress, which is expected to be done in April. I wrote to the Health and Sport Committee on 19 October 2020 to explain that we had agreed to delay Dr Strang's review to no later than April 2021. That was to enable Dr Strang to meaningfully engage with—*[Inaudible.]*—

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

**Clare Haughey:** —for whom using a digital medium is not always suitable. At that time, I assured the committee—

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

Thank you. At this rate, I will not be able to get through all the questions, even if there are no supplementaries. We should have shorter answers, please.

### Port Glasgow Health Centre

**3. Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and Inverclyde health and social care partnership regarding either a replacement for, or investment in, Port Glasgow health centre. (S5O-05059)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman):** Port Glasgow health centre is one of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde's priorities for investment in community infrastructure. However, the Scottish Government has not received any proposals for it as yet. We will review any proposals that are submitted in due course.

**Stuart McMillan:** I spoke recently to Jane Grant, the chief executive of the health board, regarding the Port Glasgow health centre. I am pleased that the discussions were very helpful.

However, does the cabinet secretary agree that, as the £8 million Orchard View hospital in Greenock has been built and the £20 million Greenock health centre is nearing completion, replacement of the ageing Port Glasgow health centre would provide my constituents with a truly first-class facility, in addition to proving yet again the commitment of the Scottish National Party to invest in health facilities in Inverclyde?

**Jeane Freeman:** I agree with Stuart McMillan's view. The Scottish Government is committed to

the health service and improving it, not only in Inverclyde but across Scotland. We do that in the face of a cut to capital resource of 5 per cent from the Westminster Government, within which we have a cut of 67 per cent of financial transactions, so the envelope that we are working in is significantly curtailed.

#### **Covid-19 Vaccine (Hospital Patients)**

**4. Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to ensure that older patients in hospital are receiving the Covid-19 vaccine. (S5O-05060)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman):** On 5 February this year, the chief medical officer for Scotland issued a letter to all health boards, setting out the guidance on how health boards should vaccinate those within eligible Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation priority cohorts in hospital prior to discharge in circumstances where that cohort is currently receiving vaccination in the community. Of course, care should be taken to check records for previous history of Covid vaccination and for confirmation of vaccine, and steps should be taken to enable a second dose, as appropriate. All those decisions are quite rightly made by clinicians, taking into account all those factors.

**Alexander Burnett:** I have a constituent in their 80s who was recently transferred from NHS Highland to NHS Grampian but has not been vaccinated. Can the cabinet secretary clarify where the responsibility lies for that constituent receiving their vaccine and what measures are being taken to ensure that those who transfer between health boards are not slipping through the cracks?

**Jeane Freeman:** Without knowing the particular circumstances of the individual to whom Mr Burnett referred, I cannot comment—nor should I. However, if he cares to send me that information, I would be happy—as I have said many times in the chamber and in frequent letters to MSPs—to look at the situation.

The chief medical officer and the chief operating officer for the NHS have regular discussions with both the vaccination teams across the country and the chief executives to make sure that those policies are being implemented. However, inevitably, there may be occasions when someone falls through the cracks. As soon as we are alerted to that, we will take action to redress it.

#### **Mental Health Services (Demand)**

**5. Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to address the reported increased demand for mental health services. (S5O-05061)

**The Minister for Mental Health (Clare Haughey):** The Scottish Government is working closely with national health service boards to assess the impact of Covid-19 on mental health services in terms of both demand and capacity, which includes anticipatory workforce planning that boards are considering as part of their wider plans to remobilise services.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You caught me short there, minister.

**Alex Rowley:** The latest Government figures show that almost a third of Scots are reporting high levels of psychological stress. The second Scottish Covid-19 mental health tracker study revealed that suicidal thinking had been reported by 13.3 per cent of respondents, compared to 9.6 per cent in the initial report in October. I very much welcome the announcement today by NHS Tayside on the living life well strategy. Does the minister accept that we need to develop such strategies across Scotland? Will she work with every health board to look at putting in place the support that is necessary?

**Clare Haughey:** Alex Rowley will be aware that, on 16 February, the Scottish Government announced £120 million for the mental health recovery and renewal fund, which will ensure the delivery of our mental health transition and recovery plan, including a programme of tailored work that will help individual boards to respond effectively to the anticipated increase in demand in the months ahead. Mental health remains a priority for the Government, and we will continue to work closely with both NHS boards and the third sector to ensure that people get the right help and support in the right place when they need it.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Bill Kidd has a supplementary question.

**Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP):** How will the £120 million in additional funding that the minister mentioned, which was announced by the finance secretary last week, improve access to medical health services for those with pre-existing mental health conditions?

**Clare Haughey:** The £120 million that has been announced for the mental health recovery and renewal fund will ensure that our mental health transition and recovery plan is delivered. That covers all patients who are new to mental health services and those with existing mental health conditions. Alongside our tailored improvement support for national health service boards, the funding will support our on-going work to improve specialist child and adolescent mental health services, to address long waiting times and clear waiting-list backlogs. Nearly £10 million of the money will be allocated to clearing backlogs in psychological therapy waiting lists for adults.

### **Mental Health Service (Staffing)**

**6. Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government how many new staff will be required to meet the mental health needs of people following the Covid-19 pandemic. (S5O-05062)

**The Minister for Mental Health (Clare Haughey):** Our transition and recovery plan lays out the actions that are designed to support mental health needs across Scotland. It includes a commitment to develop a renewal programme for mental health services and to undertake an assessment of future workforce needs. Additionally, we are working with national health service boards to assess the impact of Covid-19 on mental health services. That includes anticipatory workforce planning, which boards are considering as part of their wider plans to remobilise services.

That builds on our prior work in publishing, in December 2019, the first integrated national health and social care workforce plan in the United Kingdom. The plan sets out how health and social care services will meet growing demand and how we will ensure that we have the right numbers of staff with the right skills across health and social care services.

**Finlay Carson:** Bearing in mind that, prior to the pandemic, the Royal College of Psychiatrists in Scotland had reported serious recruitment gaps in specialist mental health services, which is coupled with a recent poll suggesting that more than one in four people believe that the pandemic will have a damaging effect on their mental health, will the minister pledge to provide the resources that are needed to address the issue through well-staffed services in the short and long term?

**Clare Haughey:** Mental health is and will continue to be an absolute priority for the Government. Last week, we announced £120 million for the mental health recovery and renewal fund, which is the single largest investment in mental health in the history of devolution. That is in addition to the £142.1 million that had already been allocated to mental health in the 2021-22 budget. Our recovery and renewal fund will ensure the delivery of the mental health plan that we published in October last year, which, as I mentioned, includes a commitment to undertake an assessment of future workforce needs as part of our renewal programme for mental health services.

I am happy to provide the member with information about the additional recruitment that has been done under the Government. I will continue to work closely with the Royal College of Psychiatrists to discuss its concerns about the

mental health services workforce and in relation to the choose psychiatry programme.

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** How is the Government working with third sector community mental health services, including those across Dumfries and Galloway, to provide greater access in local settings and to signpost people to mental health services that are close to their communities?

**Clare Haughey:** The Scottish Government financially supports a wide range of third sector organisations that contribute to its improvement agenda for mental health and wellbeing. We know that the Covid-19 pandemic has had and will continue to have a substantial impact on the mental health of the population, and our transition and recovery plan recognises the role of the third sector in the delivery of our mental health ambitions. Specifically, we will ensure that third sector organisations are among our core strategic partners for the development and implementation of the actions in the plan. In the light of the new challenges that third sector organisations face, we will continue to work in partnership with the sector at strategic and operational levels.

### **Elective Surgery (NHS Grampian)**

**7. Tom Mason (North East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has to reduce the backlog of elective surgical procedures that have arisen in the NHS Grampian area due to the Covid-19 pandemic. (S5O-05063)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman):** Published figures for NHS Grampian on 30 December 2020 show 10,680 patients waiting more than 12 weeks for surgical procedures. We are, of course, aware of the current pressures and we anticipated them in our work to respond to the Covid pandemic, which is why we published in November the clinical prioritisation framework for elective care, which sets out the principles that national health service boards follow when considering decisions around prioritising cases on their elective care waiting lists during the Covid-19 pandemic.

At the same time, NHS Grampian, like other boards, is also in the process of completing its plan for restarting services in 2021-22, as we successfully suppress the virus. These plans will seek to balance the need to address the backlog with the need to provide front-line staff with the time and support that they require to recover from the significant pressure that they have been working under for the past 12 months.

**Tom Mason:** According to the latest data, in December, planned operations in the NHS Grampian area stood at the second-highest rate of any health board. That is in addition to procedures

postponed since March last year, which number well into the thousands. We understand that hospitals must try to prioritise treating the Covid virus, but these are critical operations and the effect on patients of cancellation could be severe. Can the cabinet secretary assure me that NHS Grampian will have everything that it needs to get through the backlog? Further, when will my constituents again be seen within the statutory waiting times?

**Jeane Freeman:** Mr Mason is absolutely right to say that these are critical questions and critical operations, not least for the individuals who are waiting to have them. That is the point of the prioritisation framework. It is an iterative exercise that is clinically led. The framework itself is clinically written in order to ensure that a patient's status and the criticality of their operation are continually updated, according to how they are progressing.

That is also the point of the plans that I just outlined briefly. The plans will come to the Scottish Government at the end of this month—that is, by the start of next week—and we will then be able to consider them and think about how we can continue to resource our health boards to increasingly return to non-Covid healthcare as we successfully combat the Covid pandemic.

Of course, one thing cannot happen without the other. The measures that we take as a Government to continue to suppress the virus to its lowest possible level, all the restrictions that we ask the public to comply with—and we thank them for doing that—the vaccination programme, the testing programme and so on are all of a piece. We cannot pick one out without also considering the others.

As we make progress, I will, of course, be happy to update the member on NHS Grampian's particular approach.

### **Mental Health Services (Rural Areas)**

8. **Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of mental health services in rural areas. (S5O-05064)

**The Minister for Mental Health (Clare Haughey):** As part of our national health service remobilisation process, health boards were asked to submit plans that include mental health services, and we have been working closely with all territorial boards, including those covering rural areas, throughout the pandemic to plan the recovery of services across Scotland. The needs of rural areas are taken into account both in response to the pandemic and in our plan for recovery. The Scottish Government acknowledges the difficulties that some people can face in

accessing services in rural areas and is committed to providing clear, comprehensive and accessible support for mental health.

**Colin Smyth:** Shocking new figures on suicide from the Office for National Statistics show that 123 agricultural workers across Britain, including 21 in Scotland, took their lives in 2019. A recent study by the Farm Safety Foundation found that 88 per cent of farmers under the age of 40 now rank poor mental health as the biggest hidden problem facing farmers today.

Given that the pandemic and the measures to control it have exacerbated the problems of isolation and access to services in rural communities, does the minister agree that we need better-targeted mental health support, in particular focused on prevention and early identification of the risks associated with working in agriculture?

**Clare Haughey:** The needs of rural areas and their communities are taken into account in our response to the pandemic and our plan for recovery. We have provided a range of funding to support mental health, including an expansion of the NHS 24 mental health hub phone lines, so that service is now available 24 hours a day, seven days a week; increasing capacity of the breathing space telephone and web support service; increased capacity for digital delivery, including computerised cognitive behavioural therapy; and an expansion of the Distress Brief Intervention programme, so that anyone who phones the NHS 24 mental health hub in emotional distress from anywhere in Scotland who does not need emergency clinical intervention and is assessed as appropriate for referral to DBI can be referred to the programme.

So far, more than 2,000 people have been referred for DBI support via that pathway since it went live in the spring of 2020.

The mental health transition and recovery plan, to which I have referred in previous answers, provides an outline of our continuing response to the mental health impacts of Covid-19. The plan recognises the challenges of rural isolation and includes action to work with the national rural mental health forum to develop an approach to ensure that rural communities have equal and timely access to mental health support and services, regardless of where they are in the country.

**Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD):** Freedom of information requests found that the 18 week target for child and adolescent mental health services had been breached by a total of 1,316 days in Shetland in 2020-21. Staff are doing everything that they can, but it is clear that we need more boots on the ground to deal with the

mental health crisis. What is being done to get more professionals in the pipeline in rural and island communities?

**Clare Haughey:** I am very familiar with mental health services in Shetland, having visited them on a couple of occasions. I commend them for the work that they have done.

CAMHS staffing under this Scottish National Party Government has increased by 76 per cent, but we recognise that there has been an increase in demand, and there has been an impact on waiting times due to Covid restrictions.

However, services across Scotland are remobilising. As I said in a previous answer, we are supporting boards that are having more difficulty and more challenges in tackling their waiting times. The £120 million that the Cabinet Secretary for Finance announced last week will help us to deliver our transition and recovery plan and to tackle some of the backlogs in CAMHS services, ensuring that young people get the service that they need.

## Budget (Scotland) (No 5) Bill: Stage 1

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Lewis Macdonald):** The next item of businesses is a debate on motion S5M-24224, in the name of Kate Forbes, on the Budget (Scotland) (No 5) Bill at stage 1.

14:58

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Kate Forbes):** I start by thanking the Finance and Constitution Committee for its report, to which I will respond ahead of stage 3.

Today, we are reminded of the difference that one year can make. At this point in our consideration of last year's budget bill, we had yet to pivot to respond to the emerging threat of the virus; that was to come in the following days. Since then, it has been clear that only by working together as a Parliament can we provide the support that our people, businesses and communities need and deserve.

That is what I have worked hard to do with this budget. I am committed to building the consensus across the chamber that we need to deliver this budget for Scotland. Why? Simply because this budget is key to supporting our economy and public services, to funding the vaccination programme and to laying the foundations for recovery. To do all that, the budget needs to pass, and that is why I appeal to parties across the Parliament to work together to secure its passage.

The constantly evolving impacts of Covid, combined with the financial uncertainty presented by the delayed United Kingdom budget, have meant that this has been a challenging budget to produce, and I recognise that it has also been difficult for Parliament to scrutinise it. I have been as open and transparent as possible in updating Parliament on our funding position. That includes the £1.1 billion of additional spending proposals that I announced last week for next year's budget.

The delayed UK budget in March is key to confirming what the actual funding position will be for Scotland next year. It is likely that that will mean that we need to make further changes to the bill following the UK budget to ensure that the allocations reflect the available resources and to secure parliamentary support.

Over the past few weeks, I have met every party in Parliament several times, and I thank all members for their consideration of the budget and their willingness to engage in discussions. The additional £1.1 billion of spending proposals that I outlined last week reflected the cross-Parliament priorities that were identified in those discussions.

It included the Liberal Democrats' request for an increase in spending for mental health and education; it responded to the Greens' suggestion to focus on energy efficiency measures and further steps to tackle poverty and inequalities; and it reflected the cross-party ask to extend non-domestic rates relief, increase the funds for affordable homes and enhance local government's budget. That is because my overarching objective is to support the people of Scotland through these most challenging of months.

That brings me to the two reasoned amendments to the Budget (Scotland) (No 5) Bill today. I should state at the outset that the Government does not vote for reasoned amendments to the budget bill until negotiations with other parties have been completed. I ask Labour and the Tories to continue to negotiate in good faith before stage 2 and after the UK Government's budget in order to make progress on their proposals.

I thank Jackie Baillie for the various discussions that we have had over the past few weeks in relation to her amendment. I remain fully committed to exploring her proposals in advance of stage 2 and after the UK Government's budget, which will provide greater clarity on the funding that is available to us.

I am sympathetic to considering the further steps that we can take to support carers and so will carefully examine that proposal in detail over the next fortnight. Two main issues still need to be considered to ensure that the proposal is deliverable, which is why I regret that I cannot support the amendment as it stands.

One of those issues is that the Government has already committed to collective bargaining—a principle to which I know the Labour Party also holds—and I would not want anything to cut across that. Secondly, the proposal needs to be affordable. Ultimately, the Government and I need to ensure that proposals on pay, which are recurring and so cannot be covered by one-off Covid consequentials, can be funded, particularly when there will be knock-on impacts on other workforces. My public commitment today, however, is to explore carers' pay with officials and Jackie Baillie on behalf of the Labour Party over the coming weeks to see whether we can come to a compromise.

On Murdo Fraser's amendment, I have repeatedly thanked local government for their efforts over the past year, which is why I provided a further £275 million to local government in this past week's statement. Anything further is subject to the UK Government's budget, as all funding has been committed, including the pre-emptive assumption of an additional £500 million of Covid

consequentials and a pledge to support businesses.

I know that the Liberal Democrats and the Greens have further asks. I hope that all parties will consider enabling the bill to pass at stage 1 so that those proposals can be considered in good faith.

While engagement across party lines continues, the budget is already delivering the certainty that businesses need. A key ask from businesses, and from members of the Parliament, was to extend this year's rates relief for retail, hospitality and leisure for the whole of next year. I was pleased to propose that extended relief in my statement last week and to provide that certainty to businesses in these critically impacted sectors. On top of that, we now provide for the lowest poundage available anywhere in the UK, saving ratepayers more than £120 million when compared with previously published plans.

This pandemic is first and foremost a health crisis. We have a commitment to ensure that all health consequentials are passed on in full. We have not only delivered that commitment for next year but exceeded it. As I announced last week, we are proposing to provide £120 million of additional funding to help tackle the pandemic's significant mental health impacts, exceeding the Liberal Democrats' ask for an additional £100 million for mental health. At the same time, we are providing further support for the recovery of the national health service with an additional £60 million to continue that vital work. Overall, the budget provides a record level of spending on our health front line.

Members across the chamber have asked that we provide a fair settlement for local government. Next year's local government settlement will be £11.6 billion. In addition, local government will receive £259 million of non-recurring additional Covid funding. The settlement not only gives local authorities the resources and flexibility to respond to the new challenges that the pandemic has created but, through our policy of guaranteeing non-domestic rates revenues, provides continued fiscal certainty that does not exist in England.

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Does the cabinet secretary accept the case that has been put forward by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities that the core funding for local government from the Scottish Government is increasing by just 0.9 per cent in the coming year?

**Kate Forbes:** Murdo Fraser has picked up that there is a difference between Covid consequential funding and our own core settlement funding. Out of our core settlement funding, which is designed to cover recurring costs for services that local government is key to delivering, such as

education, our non-Covid recurring settlement has not increased that much, but we have tried to protect the local government settlement. Over and above that, we have passed on to local government the additional Covid consequential for the Scottish Government, including the £259 million for next year that I mentioned, which was topped up by £275 million to help with Covid pressures. Therefore, there is a distinction to be made between recurring and non-recurring funding.

We are also the only devolved Government to have committed to extend the Covid-19 reliefs into 2021-22, replacing £719 million of non-domestic rates income.

I recognise the contribution of our public sector workers, and the ambition on all sides of the chamber, including mine, to go further on public sector pay. The UK Government pay freeze has a direct and material impact on our funding position. A balance needs to be struck between fairly rewarding public sector workers, ensuring job security and maintaining employment levels across all sectors in the wider Scottish economy. Nevertheless, our progressive approach to pay maximises awards for the lowest paid, which recognises that the impacts of the pandemic have not been felt equally across our society, while ensuring that pay rises are affordable now and in the future.

All that clearly shows that this budget will deliver on the key priorities of creating jobs and supporting our sustainable recovery while responding to the health crisis and tackling inequality. I have responded to the asks from across the chamber, and I hope that we can all come together to pass the budget and deliver this important funding for the people of Scotland.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Budget (Scotland) (No.5) Bill.

15:07

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** The Cabinet Secretary for Finance is indeed a fortunate person, because the budget that she is setting out today is the largest in the history of devolution. It is the highest ever budget that a Scottish Administration has had to deal with, and more money than any of her predecessors in office had. That is all thanks to the broad shoulders and the deep pockets of the British Government, which is supporting individuals, businesses and public services in Scotland at this difficult time.

In this budget, revenue has increased, according to the Scottish Parliament information centre—

**The Minister for Trade, Innovation and Public Finance (Ivan McKee):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Murdo Fraser:** Of course.

**Ivan McKee:** Murdo Fraser talks about broad shoulders, but can he tell us how much of that money the UK Government has had to borrow?

**Murdo Fraser:** Let us just be thankful—*[Interruption.]* Let us just be thankful that we are part of Great Britain, which is the fifth largest economy in the world, with the strength and security of a financial system that allows us to borrow money easily and cheaply on the international markets. How foolish it would be to give up the opportunity to borrow that money in such a secure financial system, as members on the Scottish National Party benches would have us do. *[Interruption.]* If members will all calm down for a second, I can carry on with the rest of my speech.

According to SPICe, in this budget, revenue is increasing by some 11 per cent from last year to next. Those figures take no account of the additional Covid support that we have seen in the current financial year—some £9.7 billion in Barnett consequentials, guaranteed funding for the NHS and individuals, and support for businesses throughout Scotland.

Back in January, I set out a number of our budget asks to the finance secretary, and I am pleased that many of them have already been delivered, thanks again to the additional funds from the British Government.

We asked for no further increases in income tax. That has been delivered, because there is more money coming from the British Government.

We asked for more money to employ teachers, who are much needed in our schools at this time. That is being delivered—thanks to more money from the British Government.

We asked for all Barnett consequentials arising from the extra NHS spending down south to be passed on to the health service. More money is being delivered—thanks to the British Government.

We asked for the 100 per cent rates relief for businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure sector—which has been hard hit by Covid restrictions, as we know—to be extended for a further 12 months. That has been delivered—thanks to the British Government.

**Kate Forbes:** I agree with the member that all those things are wonderful. Of course, the Scottish public will not enjoy any of that unless the budget passes. Will the Tories ensure that it does?

**Murdo Fraser:** The Scottish people will not enjoy any of it if we break our link with the British Government, which is providing all that money to back up the public services of Scotland.

We have asked for the existing business support schemes to be continued, and the Cabinet Secretary for Finance has indicated her willingness to do that. Although the existing schemes are welcome, I have raised with her before, as have many other members from different parties, the need to make sure that the schemes are as comprehensive as possible.

Too many of my constituents still say that they are not eligible for existing support schemes. Often, their businesses are not legally obliged to close—they are still permitted to trade—but they have seen a huge percentage of their trade disappear. We see that in aspects of retail, in bed and breakfasts and in parts of the tourism and events sector, and I heard about it just yesterday from people who operate in the wedding sector. Although the sector-specific funds that have been set up are very welcome, many businesses do not meet the criteria for them.

The discretionary funds that are available to local authorities are also welcome but, in many cases, the funds available simply do not go far enough to meet the need. For example, I know that, in some councils, the total that can be paid out to an individual business is £2,000. In many cases, that goes nowhere near meeting the need that must be met if we are to help businesses survive over the remaining months of lockdown restrictions.

The British Government is stepping up, extending the furlough scheme and providing direct support for businesses in Scotland. I hope that the Scottish Government will do the same with the funds at its disposal.

Although we welcome much in the budget, there are issues that remain to be addressed. Our reasoned amendment today sets out two areas of concern for us.

The first concern relates to the local government settlement. Yesterday, the Parliament discussed and voted on a fiscal framework for local councils that would provide a fair funding settlement. Conservative members proposed that councils' budgets should increase at least in line with the total increases in the Scottish budget.

I have referred to the fact that the revenue budget that is available to the Cabinet Secretary for Finance had gone up, according to SPICe, by some 11 per cent. I accept that some of that is non-recurring funding. However, according to COSLA, core revenue funding for councils is not up by 11 per cent, or even by half of that; it is up by less than a tenth—by 0.9 per cent. That 0.9 per

cent will only just cover one half of the likely increase in staff costs, if councils follow the Scottish Government's pay policy.

According to COSLA, the revenue shortfall just to stand still in the coming year amounts to some £362 million. That money would not allow councils to do anything extra over and above what they are currently doing; it is simply what they need to meet existing commitments. The budget that is before us therefore falls short of what is required.

The Government needs to stop treating local councils as the whipping boy of the budget process. It needs to start treating councils fairly, and it should start with this budget.

The other concern that I highlight relates to the provision of free breakfasts and lunches for all primary school pupils, which the Parliament voted for last year and which needs to be delivered as soon as possible. We know that there are clear benefits in health and educational outcomes from providing such meals to young children. If the Government is serious about helping to tackle poverty and the attainment gap, it can do it now, rather than kick it into the long grass.

While there is much in the budget that we welcome, it is there only because of the deep pockets and broad shoulders of the British Government. As it stands, it is not a budget that we can support, because it falls short of what the Scottish people and Scottish society require.

I have pleasure in moving amendment S5M-24224.1, to insert at end:

“, but, in so doing, regrets that the Scottish Government's draft Budget fails to meet the level of funding required by local authorities, as set out by COSLA, and further regrets that the Scottish Government has made no commitment in this draft Budget to fund free breakfasts and lunches for all primary school pupils.”

15:14

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** When the Parliament passed the budget on 5 March 2020, we could not have foreseen the year that lay ahead. Eight days later, the first patient in Scotland died of coronavirus; today, the death toll stands at 7,084. Every one of those deaths is a tragedy and every person was a mother, father, son or daughter who is mourned by the people whom they have left behind.

I want to note those deaths at the start of the debate, because the proposals that are before us must be among our first steps in recovering from this national tragedy. Nothing can bring back the thousands of people whom coronavirus has taken from us, but the actions that we take today, if we choose well, can prevent more harm. They can prevent harm not only from the direct effects of the virus, but from mass unemployment that could

drive hundreds of thousands of people into poverty. They can prevent harm from the suffering that could result from the NHS struggling to get back on its feet and to provide vital care to people who suffer from life-threatening diseases such as cancer, or who are waiting in pain for too long for operations, and they can prevent harm from the lagging effects of increased inequality that could damage the life chances of our young people for years and years to come.

We have the chance to choose a different direction of travel and to make it a budget for recovery—one that invests in our economy, gives us the best chance of protecting jobs and businesses, remobilises our NHS and rewards our front-line workers. There is much in the budget that we welcome, including the deep pockets of the UK Government, but it does not go far enough.

The coronavirus crisis might have exposed the deep inequalities in our society, but it did not create them. The truth is that when the pandemic hit, Scotland's economy was still struggling to recover fully from the last recession. We cannot afford for the Government to make the same mistakes as it made after the last economic crisis.

We need from the Government a bolder and more ambitious budget that does not just take Scotland back to where we were before coronavirus, but builds the foundations for a better and more prosperous future. That is why we are genuinely disappointed that the Scottish National Investment Bank, which the First Minister called

“one of the most significant developments in the lifetime of this Parliament”

only three months ago, has had its budget cut. It is why we have called for more support for councils and for the Government to fill the £518 million Covid funding gap that local government is experiencing. It is why we want more funding for mental health. While England and Wales are spending 11 per cent of their health budget on mental health, Scotland is spending only 8 per cent, and the SNP Government cut services by £26 million in real terms between 2010 and 2019.

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** Is Jackie Baillie arguing that a higher percentage should be given to mental health and that a lower percentage—therefore, a cut—should be given to other health services?

**Jackie Baillie:** There is no need for a cut. If John Mason listens to his finance secretary, he will hear that there is now a lot more money than ever going into health. It is the highest budget ever, so there is an opportunity to invest some of that new money in mental health. That is an objective that we should all share.

I turn to the people who are being most let down by the budget and who are the subject of Labour's amendment—social care workers. Those workers have looked after some of our most vulnerable people during the pandemic and we clapped for them every week during the first lockdown. They deserve more than our praise, however. They deserve a raise.

As it stands, the budget has no provision for a pay increase beyond the living wage for social care workers. Social care workers are mostly women and are low paid, and many of them have to work more than one job to make ends meet. During the pandemic, they put themselves at risk and dealt with death on a daily basis. The truth is that they were badly let down by the Government in terms of provision of personal protective equipment, lack of guidance and routine discharge of patients with Covid from hospitals to care homes, which was a decision that created a wave of deaths that many of them had to face every day they went to work. It is unacceptable that we should be asking people to do those jobs for poverty pay.

That is why we have lodged a reasoned amendment that backs the GMB's call for £15 an hour for social care workers. That is not just about fair pay for a day's work; it is, fundamentally, about decency and dignity. We cannot and should not expect people to do some of the most demanding jobs in our society for poverty pay. The coronavirus crisis has opened the public's eyes to the work that social care workers do. It is not just the workers, their unions and Labour members who are demanding action; the public also wants to see those workers being rewarded.

I thank Kate Forbes, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, for her positive engagement on that issue. Labour's reasoned amendment reflects those discussions and provides for a staged approach of an immediate rise to £12 per hour, followed by a review in order to reach £15 per hour. I am happy to agree to continuing discussions with the cabinet secretary in order that we can get to that point.

Let me be very clear, however. Although there is much in the budget that we would like to see being improved, if the Government accepts our amendment and, therefore, rewards social care workers and gives them the respect that they deserve, the Government can rely on Labour's support for the budget at stage 3.

I move amendment S5M-24224.2, to insert at end:

“, and, in so doing, notes the calls for an immediate rise in 2021-22 to £12 per hour for all social care workers followed by a review to establish steps to increase this to £15 an hour to fully recognise the value of their work.”

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Bruce Crawford will speak on behalf of the Finance and Constitution Committee.

15:21

**Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP):** When I agreed to take on the role of convener of the Finance and Constitution Committee—unbelievably, almost five years ago—I could never have imagined how much of a rollercoaster I was letting myself in for. Although the mysteries of the fiscal framework and the impact of Brexit were challenging enough, they have, of course, been overshadowed by the tragic national emergency that we continue to face.

In what is probably my last speech as convener, I pay tribute to my colleagues on the committee throughout session 5, who have largely put political differences to one side in carrying out our essential scrutiny role. We have worked primarily on a consensual basis and always in a constructive and respectful manner. Indeed, we have unanimously agreed all our budget and pre-budget reports during this parliamentary session, which is an achievement for any committee that is dealing with the budget.

I sincerely thank our clerking team, which is led by James Johnston. Its members have supported, advised and—yes—sometimes cautioned me on my approach. They are remarkable, incredibly hard working professionals whom, over the course of the past five years, I have come to greatly admire. [*Applause.*]

Presiding Officer, it is inevitable that the focus of our report on the budget for 2021-22 has been on the economic and fiscal impact of the pandemic. We recognise that the progress of the vaccination programme provides room for optimism, but the UK and Scottish economic and fiscal outlooks remain highly uncertain. The impact of the UK's trading relationship with the EU also remains unclear.

Given that continuing uncertainty, and with borrowing costs extraordinarily low, the committee's view is that economic recovery from the crisis, rather than fiscal consolidation, should be the priority in the next financial year.

The committee notes that there does not yet appear to be evidence of an overall differential impact on the Scottish economy relative to the UK economy from the pandemic or from the future trading relationship with the EU. Given the way that the fiscal framework operates, that means that the Scottish budget is relatively well protected from the continuing UK-wide economic shock. However, the medium-term financial strategy highlights

“a considerable risk that the Scottish Income Tax base might prove less resilient to COVID-19”

and to Brexit,

“simply due to differences in the sectoral composition of the two economies”,

once we begin to emerge from the pandemic. The MTFS also suggests that

“differences are likely to emerge”

when business support measures such as the furlough scheme are withdrawn. The committee has invited the cabinet secretary to explain what actions have been—or can be—taken by the Scottish Government to address that considerable risk.

We have also recommended that our successor committee continue to monitor closely the impact of Scotland's relative tax performance on the budget as the economy emerges from the pandemic and as Government support is withdrawn.

A key question for the committee was the extent to which the pandemic has had a differential impact on sections of the population and sectors of the economy. Although some sections of the population have been well protected in terms of employment and income, others have suffered economically.

The pandemic has led to more job losses, higher rates of furlough and less ability to work from home among younger, lower-income and less-educated people. The committee therefore recognises that it is highly likely that the crisis has exacerbated existing structural inequalities, with particularly severe consequences for people on low incomes.

It is the committee's view that a fair economic recovery from Covid will require proactive measures to reduce inequalities in wealth and income, with a need for a particular focus on supporting lower-income, less-educated and younger workers into the labour market. The recovery should also help them to progress up through the labour market while driving up standards of pay and workplace rights.

The committee also suggests that, as we emerge from national lockdown, the Scottish Government should consider targeting business support at protecting the jobs and businesses that are subject to restrictions and to temporarily lower demand. That support should also be targeted at incubating emerging businesses and sectors.

The committee recognises that the fiscal and economic challenges arising from Covid-19 are enormous. However, a crisis can create new thinking. As we begin to shift our focus from crisis management to recovery, it is essential that the

differential impact of the pandemic, especially on low-income families, is addressed. That also creates an opportunity to re-examine the persistent structural inequalities in our society. There can be little doubt that such inequalities have been exacerbated by the current crisis.

There should be an examination of how the structure of devolved taxes could be reformed to support a fair and equal economic recovery, and the committee recommends a fundamental consideration of what the Scottish tax system is designed to achieve. In particular, any review should consider the role of tax policy in achieving a just, sustainable and strong economy as we emerge from the grip of Covid. That should include examination of the breadth and nature of the tax base, of the impact of economic growth on the size of the tax base and of the relationship between local, Scottish and UK-wide taxes.

We recommend a national conversation, led jointly by the Government and the Parliament, which should include a wide range of voices from across Scotland. I have every confidence that the Parliament can rise to the enormous challenge it will face in session 6 in addressing the tragic and brutal impact of Covid.

I will finish on a more optimistic note. I have tremendously enjoyed my role as convener, and I wish our successor committee the very best of luck in dealing with the significant challenges that it and the new Parliament will undoubtedly face.

15:28

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** If that is Bruce Crawford's final speech, he will be a huge loss to the Parliament. He has made an immense contribution to political life in Scotland. *[Applause.]* I have always admired his persistent, polite and respectful approach to politics, despite the strain that he has faced on some occasions. I wish him well in the future.

The Liberal Democrats will vote for the budget at stage 1. We will support it because of the gains that we secured from the finance secretary and which she announced in her statement to the Parliament last week: £120 million for mental health to make spending up to £1.2 billion, which was a goal that we set to address the mental health crisis; additional funds for education to help pupils bounce back from the loss of schooling in the pandemic; and more support for businesses that are on their knees in lockdown.

Those are the priorities that we set out to Kate Forbes in our discussions. She followed through in her statement last week and we are grateful for that; that is sufficient to secure our support at stage 1. The finance secretary knows however, because I have told her, that we are on the hunt

for more from the next stages of the budget. We suspect that more funds will come from the Chancellor in his budget in March, and we know the finance secretary is wise and will have kept funds back for future negotiations. We know that more money will be available.

We will be looking for support for local government, which stepped up during the pandemic when it mattered most but which continues to be at the rough end of the Government's priorities. Local government has faced a cut to its capital budget just when investment is required. It has been compensated for the council tax freeze, but the support is not enough and is not built into the budgets for future years.

We will be looking to address the unfairness of the funding for the north-east of Scotland. We want more support for businesses and people who have been left behind, especially those in the tourism sector.

**Jackie Baillie:** I invite Willie Rennie to say whether he would support a pay rise for social care workers.

**Willie Rennie:** Jackie Baillie has obviously read my speech. I will address that in a second.

On education, we want more bounce-back funds for pupils to help them to recover from the pandemic. The Scottish Government still does not have adequate plans in place to give young people in our schools the boost that they will need in the coming year.

Of course, additional support for mental health is still required, because we have a mental health crisis in this country.

There is a lot to do to put the recovery first, and we will argue for that, but I say to the finance secretary that our plans will be affordable. I will set out details in a letter to her in the coming days to ensure that, together, we fully understand what we are seeking to get.

We will abstain on both amendments, because we want to take the issues that are being raised by the Conservatives and the Labour Party into the discussions. I am particularly supportive of the aims of the campaign to pay social care workers £15 per hour. We have had discussions with the GMB about that, so I am keen to explore further with the Government what can be done in that area.

The Liberal Democrat party has always hunted for agreement, rather than chased after division. Over the past year, we have worked constructively with a host of ministers. *[Interruption.]* I can hear them crying out right now. They are desperate for more co-operation. However, we sometimes disagree—sometimes vigorously—because it is

our role to scrutinise and challenge to ensure that things get better.

Of course, in the middle of a global pandemic that has resulted in thousands of people dying, even more people being in hospital, thousands of people being out of work and our way of life being shut down, it will take the combined efforts of everyone to overcome the challenges. We want the budget to succeed in getting money to schools, to businesses and to people who need mental health support. There are no guarantees that we will support the budget at stage 3 but, with good will and a bit of give and take on both sides, it might just be possible. At a time of crisis, we must do our best to make things work.

15:32

**Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** I assumed that we would hear from Bruce Crawford in the stage 3 debate on the budget but, if that was his last contribution as the convener of the Finance and Constitution Committee, I thank him for his work in that role. I think that those thanks will be echoed by members of all parties, including everyone who has served on the committee.

The Green approach to budgets has always focused on putting forward positive, workable proposals that seek to make improvements. Our work is the reason why there have not been the cuts to local government that the SNP has proposed since 2016. It is why Scotland has a fairer tax system, which the Greens alone proposed at the last election. It is why there has been progress on issues from marine protected areas to local rail, and from teachers' pay to energy efficiency. It is also why free bus travel for under-19s will be introduced this year.

While others often seem to think that defeating the budget and throwing public services into crisis should be their objective, we know that winning improvement is the real objective. Although voting down a budget can be a necessary step, it should be a last resort.

This year, we have set out clear challenges for the Government, one of which is supporting household incomes—especially targeting those who are most in need. For goodness' sake—if the Government can afford a council tax freeze, which will give the biggest savings to the wealthy, it must be able to take more progressive steps, too. Such steps might be taken via social security, by cutting other costs such as energy bills and public transport or, indeed, by ensuring fair public sector pay. It is not for any political party to undermine the role of unions by determining what they should accept, but it is clear that the Government will need to go further to meet reasonable demands.

We have also set out proposals to take forward a truly green recovery. All political parties talk a good game on that, but they then keep backing oil and gas, aviation, road building and all the failed priorities of the past. Those need to be replaced with investment in a sustainable future.

We have put those priorities to the Government. We do not yet have agreement, therefore we cannot yet support the budget bill and will abstain to allow it to proceed to stage 2. Such a situation was probably inevitable given that, yet again, the UK Government has delayed its own budget until after the Scottish budget has been published. It seems committed to wrecking its own fiscal framework.

I turn to the amendments. The Tory amendment refers to the “draft Budget”, which of course does not even exist. It also casts judgment on the settlement for local government before we know what the final position on that will be. As for the Labour amendment, I strongly support the call for fair pay for social care workers. However, Labour members know that no possible amendment to the budget could achieve that. The Scottish Government is not the employer of social care workers and cannot directly change their pay rate. As the campaign by Unite the union makes clear, if we are to achieve that we need national and sectoral bargaining that covers all care workers, which the Greens proposed in our green new deal for workers paper last year.

Scottish Greens will therefore abstain on the motion and on both amendments. We will continue to work toward budget amendments to achieve improvement for Scotland's people, both in the immediate crisis in household incomes and in the long-term drive for a green recovery.

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

15:36

**Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP):** I am conscious that, as the first back bencher to make a contribution to the debate, this comment might be premature. However, this has been the most encouraging stage 1 budget debate in which I have participated in my five years in the Parliament. We have heard substantive contributions from across the parties, and a clear desire and willingness to engage to achieve a budget that reflects all our shared priorities. That demonstrates that, contrary to what some might suggest, the Parliament is a robust institution and that when people come together and work together in good faith, results can be achieved.

Nowhere is that more in evidence than in the work of the Finance and Constitution Committee. Although I do not think that we have yet heard the

last of my friend and colleague Bruce Crawford, I pay tribute to him and to the committee's clerks for all their hard work.

When speaking in budget debates I am always conscious that we use a lot of big numbers that do not necessarily relate to the lived experience of our constituents. I would like to touch on that in my contribution, in which I want to get to the heart of what the budget actually means for people in Renfrewshire South.

In my constituency, five high schools, 18 primary schools and one special school will benefit from more than £1.8 million in pupil equity funding. Such funding is to be spent at the discretion of headteachers, with the aim of closing the attainment gap. In 2016, the SNP Scottish Government provided nearly £30 million in funding for a new Barrhead high school. The £1 billion learning estate investment programme will also benefit pupils in Renfrewshire South in coming years, with a new primary campus for Neilston primary and St Thomas's primary, and in due course a new Thorn primary in Johnstone.

Families with young children will also benefit from the increase in early learning and childcare provision from 600 to 1,140 hours, which will save them more than £4,500 per child per year. Free school meals will save around £380 per child per year. Across the areas of Renfrewshire Council and East Renfrewshire Council, around 19,000 children and 12,000 families are expected to benefit from the Scottish child payment, thanks to £68 million of investment from the Scottish Government in the budget. The budget will also deliver £70 million for the young persons guarantee, which will continue to provide work, education or training for every 16 to 24-year-old in my constituency and across Scotland.

All that is being delivered in addition to on-going support and commitments, such as the provision of the baby box that is given to every family regardless of their circumstances so as to give children the best possible start in life. Since 2017, more than 40,000 such boxes have been given out in the NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde health board area.

Health funding in Renfrewshire South will be improved through a budget increase across NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde of more than £33 million, which will help to ensure that our front-line health and care services continue to receive the support that they require at what I am sure we will all understand is a very challenging time. Our councils have been on the front line, delivering support throughout the pandemic. Last year, more than £31 million of Covid-related funds have been given out to the local authorities that cover the Renfrewshire South constituency.

The budget increases the combined budgets of Renfrewshire Council and East Renfrewshire Council by 2.6 per cent, and that is in addition to the £90 million that is being delivered across the country to support a council tax freeze and help to protect household incomes.

I know from speaking to local business owners across Renfrewshire South the pressure that they have been under. The extension of 100 per cent non-domestic rates relief for properties in the retail, hospitality, leisure and aviation sectors for all of the next financial year will come as a huge relief. High streets across my constituency are hubs for small businesses and I know that the commitment of that support will be welcome news.

The budget will help to protect our communities as we continue to fight the pandemic. With the urgent measures that it puts in place, the budget will also provide financial stability for those who need it, easing pressure on household incomes, helping those who need it and, therefore, reducing financial burdens.

The budget gives hope that, as we focus on rebuilding, we can ensure that opportunities are available for all communities, including in my Renfrewshire South constituency and across Scotland, as we emerge from the pandemic. For those reasons, I will support the budget at stage 1.

15:40

**Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I remind members of my entry in the register of members' interests, which notes that I am a partner in a farming business.

I recognise that the budget comes at a time when all Governments are facing unprecedented challenges. The period ahead of us will likely be the most unusual and least predictable in the history of this Parliament. However, we should also be conscious that this is a time of even more extreme uncertainty for Scotland's businesses and people, particularly those who are concerned about the security of their jobs and incomes.

Unfortunately, this week's statement from the First Minister did not offer a clear direction out of the tough restrictions that many businesses have been operating under. In my region, I have heard from many businesses across tourism, hospitality and a range of other sectors that have been left disappointed by the lack of a route map out of the restrictions. Those businesses have too often had lengthy waits to access support funding, and even if it has arrived, it has only just kept them afloat. Beyond that, many have made considerable losses.

Public bodies, too, have been forced to work in entirely different ways. Many schools and other

centres of learning have been empty for months. Hospitals have had a complete refocusing of the care and treatment that they provide. The police have had additional demands placed on them and local councils have been handed the administration of a number of business support schemes, as well as being on the front line in social care and other services. That has put huge additional pressure on them, and in some cases, at least, it has impacted on their ability to deliver what is expected of them.

We should have a budget that is ambitious for recovery. That we should build back better approaches being a cliché, but that must be part of our consideration at every stage. As part of their scrutiny of the climate change plan update, the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee and other committees have been considering the fact that we must aim for a green recovery that ensures that we do not go backwards in relation to climate targets, given our hard-won progress against them. A key part of that is how the Government manages its rural economy. Unfortunately, however, the backdrop is that little guidance or clarity is forthcoming from SNP ministers about the future of rural support or how it will be delivered. Our rural sector acknowledges the need for change, but it is also looking for certainty.

Despite the Government's rhetoric, the draft budget sees programmes such as the agri-environment climate scheme being given a headline cut of 20 per cent at a time when we are told that environmental measures are more essential than ever. Another key measure is the agricultural transformation programme, which supports sustainability and innovation in farming. That saw a huge underspend last year, which was then reallocated to other areas.

All of that adds up to a Scottish Government that is happy to talk about change being essential in the rural sector, yet seems to be undermining vital capital investment schemes to achieve that, all the while piling on additional regulation. In the coming year, the LEADER programme, which is so valued by our sector, will see its spending cut almost in half.

**Kate Forbes:** I am curious that the member has listed a number of schemes that came from the EU. Replacement funds have not been forthcoming from the UK Government, which is why there have been substantial cuts in those areas. Will he take that up with his UK Government colleagues?

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Tourism made that point, and I made the point back to him that that is a question of choice, given the additional

funding that the Scottish Government has received from the UK Government over the past year.

The convergence money, which was hard won by the industry and the Scottish Conservatives, has been dipped into to top up the budget for the less favoured area support scheme. That involved taking money from one part of the sector and giving it away to another, in a move that NFU Scotland described as the Scottish Government "short-changing" the farming sector.

In all of this, what the sector really needs is a sense of direction and evidence that there is a strategy for the medium term, that ministers know where they are going and that the desired priorities of today will be linked to the delivered priorities of tomorrow. This budget is a missed opportunity for that.

Despite the challenges, this is—as Murdo Fraser rightly reminded us—the largest budget that any Scottish Government has ever had at its disposal. Hundreds of millions of pounds in support have found their way to this Parliament to allocate, and we have seen further unprecedented sums through programmes such as the job retention scheme directly supporting hundreds of thousands of jobs. This is a budget that would have been impossible without the security of being part of the United Kingdom.

It should be a budget that shows ambition and sets a path for the time ahead and the challenges that we face, but instead it is a budget that falls short and finds this SNP Government wanting when businesses and working people in rural Scotland need help most.

15:45

**Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP):** At the outset of my brief remarks, I commend the finance secretary, Kate Forbes, for her very consensual approach to the setting of this year's budget. Such a consensual approach is entirely fitting in these unprecedented times and properly reflects the very difficult year that the people of Scotland have endured, and the difficult months that lie ahead as our economy takes steps on the road to recovery and sustainable renewal. I am very pleased to note that discussions on a pay increase for social care workers are on-going, for those people are indeed angels—every one of them.

The budget set forth includes a significant number of very important initiatives, including support for public sector workers and business. In the short time available, I will highlight a few initiatives that will make a real difference to the lives of my Cowdenbeath constituents.

I very much welcome the additional £125 million to help young people, those who have been made redundant and the long-term unemployed. That includes £70 million to support the young persons guarantee, which is a key Scottish Government intervention to help young people find work, training or educational opportunity. Given the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the younger generation, it is absolutely vital that all of us do everything that we can to help young people through to the other side of the pandemic and ensure that they are not left behind.

On those who have lost their jobs, an additional £35 million is being made available for skills and retraining, including for the national transition training fund, which specifically supports people who are unemployed or at risk of redundancy further to the pandemic. A further £20 million is to be made available to support the longer-term unemployed.

Another area of spending that will be of particular importance to my Cowdenbeath constituents is the commitment to spend £182 million to close the attainment gap. Each child in my Cowdenbeath constituency deserves the same life chances and opportunities as every other child in Scotland, and it is to the credit of the SNP Scottish Government that it is determined to make that a reality.

Housing is of course an important issue in my Cowdenbeath constituency, as it is across Scotland. The SNP Scottish Government's planned investment of more than £3.5 billion over the next five years is very welcome news indeed.

The £90 million that the SNP Scottish Government is making available to support a further council tax freeze is very welcome and good news for households in Fife, where we hear that Fife Council has frozen council tax for the financial year 2021-22, in the light of that additional funding that is being made available to it.

It would be remiss of me not to place the Scottish Government budget in the context in which it sits, which is regrettably that it cannot take account of all of Scotland's resources and it cannot reflect in all aspects the priorities of the people of Scotland. Rather, we can only plead with the UK Tory Government in London—a Government that we in Scotland did not vote for—to, for example, extend the furlough scheme, make the universal credit uplift permanent or request that a return to Westminster austerity politics is rejected.

Power over our resources continues to lie with Westminster, which retains the key economic levers that every other normal independent country takes for granted. What rational person

hands over their money to a neighbour and gives them absolute power, without a veto, over how it is spent? Scotland has been in that condition for too long, and independence is coming.

15:50

**Neil Findlay (Lothian) (Lab):** The convener of the Finance and Constitution Committee is right: Covid has exposed more than ever the class divisions in our society. The poorest and those in insecure work and unsuitable housing are twice as likely as others to die from Covid. The poorest are three times more likely to commit suicide and are more likely to die from addiction or cancer or to suffer from obesity. They are more likely to be the key workers who have kept the country from collapsing—the shop and food production workers, bus drivers, social care staff and factory workers. They cannot work from home. A person cannot drive a bus from their living room. A person does not have the option of showering an 80-year-old disabled person from the kitchen table while the banana loaf browns in the Aga.

They are the people we all clapped on our doorsteps. Some people took videos and selfies to show just how compassionate they were. Stuff your videos and your selfies. The way for the Government to show that it cares is by committing real, hard cash to improve those people's lives.

**Tom Arthur:** Neil Findlay raises some really important points. One of my concerns relates to when we move back into the levels system. Some parts of the country found it really difficult to get out of levels 3 and 4. Does Neil Findlay agree that there needs to be specific resource targeted at those areas if we find that, once we move back into the levels system, they struggle to get down the levels?

**Neil Findlay:** I am glad that Mr Arthur has finally come round to that view. I have been arguing all my time in the Parliament that resources have to go to the communities in most need. It is just a shame that the Government has not been listening.

The way for the Government to show that it cares is by committing real, hard cash. It is not by imposing a 1 per cent pay increase, as the Government has done in the NHS, but by paying a minimum of £15 an hour in the health and social care sector.

Last week, we saw pictures of 200 people queuing up in the snow for charitable food. That shocked many people, but it should not have shocked people. That is not new, and it does not happen just in Glasgow. Every night, I pass a food van parked at the rear entrance to Waverley station that feeds queues of hungry people.

Across every region, community projects are doing similar heroic work.

That is a scandal that is off the scale. A few weeks ago, I wrote to all the party leaders to call for cross-party talks to see whether we could come together to end hunger in Scotland. I received replies from Jackie Baillie and Andy Wightman, but not a word from anyone else. Are we not all ashamed to live in a country that cannot provide its citizens with food, which is the most basic human need? I am certainly ashamed of that.

What about housing? We had a housing crisis long before Covid. This week, we heard that Scotland has three times the level of deaths among homeless people compared with England. What is the Government's cunning plan to deal with that? It is to cut the affordable housing budget by £100 million. More than half of those homeless people who have died were drug users. The Government announced an extra £50 million out of the social housing budget, which would have helped to house the very same people. It is all just a game to the Cabinet Secretary for Finance but, in the real world, on the street, people are dying.

We see the Government, which was going to scrap the unfair council tax, going back to a freeze that will deliver a massive 1 penny a month for the lowest-income households, but £30 a month for the highest earning.

Those are deliberate political decisions that dismiss the poor and the low paid because they are less inclined to vote, and reward the middle class, which does vote.

I have no doubt that the cabinet secretary will trot out her well-rehearsed lines about where the money will come from if we want to do other things. The Government pours money down the drain as if there is no tomorrow.

Let me tell her where the money will come from. It will come from the same place as the £100 million to pay off the maliciously prosecuted Rangers liquidators; the £100 million extra to pay for ferries; and the £650 million to pay for delayed discharge over five years. It can come from there, or from the £16 million that was paid for remedial work to the sick kids hospital; the £1.4 million a month in charges for the same hospital, which has not yet treated a patient; the £50 million of remedial work at the Queen Elizabeth hospital; the £1 million of taxpayers' money that was spent on the Alex Salmond case; the salary and expenses of the cabinet secretary's predecessor, who never turns up for his work; or the £54,000 to coach civil servants to answer questions at an inquiry. That is where the money will come from. I would rather it was spent on putting something in the mouths of hungry people and putting a roof over their heads

than have the cabinet secretary and the Government pour more money down the drain.

The money is there. What is not there is the political will.

15:55

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** I welcome the commitments that have been set out in the budget. It has a specific commitment to enterprise, which will be of immense benefit to my constituents across Dumfries and Galloway and the South Scotland region.

Tom Arthur spoke of how the big numbers impact his constituents, and that is important. The budget commits to increasing the funding that is available to Scotland's enterprise agencies, including the newly established South of Scotland Enterprise, which became operational in April 2020 and hit the ground running at the start of the Covid pandemic lockdown. The budget commits an additional £3.4 million in resource funding and an additional £5 million in capital funding for SOSE, which is a combined additional investment of £8.4 million on top of the statutory funding that the agency is to receive each year.

Working with Dumfries and Galloway Council, SOSE has provided direct financial and practical support to over 500 businesses across Dumfries and Galloway during the pandemic, with essential support packages that range from £1,000 to £100,000. The leadership—Professor Russel Griggs and chief executive officer Jane Morrison-Ross—and their teams of staff have been absolutely fantastic and very helpful in my contact with them on behalf of constituents and businesses, for which I thank them.

Since its commencement, SOSE has been crucial in ensuring that local projects and community groups and initiatives are supported to survive and grow. SOSE has provided direct funding to community groups assisting with Covid resilience, as well as to initiatives that are actively working to make Dumfries and Galloway an attractive place for people and businesses—and we really need that. One such project is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization-designated Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere reserve, which recently received £1.9 million and is also working to educate and to mitigate the impact of the climate emergency. The additional funding that is awarded to SOSE in the budget will allow continued support across Dumfries and Galloway, and it will undoubtedly continue to shine a light on our region.

The budget also contains over £100 million in funding to support infrastructure and active transport. That funding includes work to implement

the recommendations in the “South West Scotland Transport Study”, which means much-needed improvements to the A75, A76 and A77, including improved east-west rail links and bus infrastructure. Many constituents have contacted me about that. I would encourage the Scottish Government to continue to ensure that those commitments are implemented and expedited as much as possible.

Almost 97,000 affordable homes have been delivered since the Government came to office, nearly 67,000 of which were for social rent, including more than 14,000 council homes. That has meant an additional 1,621 social homes and 614 affordable homes across Dumfries and Galloway in this session of Parliament alone. Since 2007, 4,484 new homes have been built in Dumfries and Galloway—[*Interruption.*]

I do not have the time to give way.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame):** The member is in her last minute—these are solely four-minute speeches.

**Emma Harper:** The building of those new homes has directly benefited families across my region.

Between 9 November and 31 December 2020, 1,470 people in Dumfries and Galloway applied for the Scottish child payment, which will be worth £10 per child for low-income families by the end of 2022.

I have been working with people in north-west Dumfries and with the Lochside community centre and grub club, who provide meals to local families with support from Scottish Government budget money. I have just written to the cabinet secretary asking whether the Government can help the club match money that it already has to purchase a van to deliver meals.

To conclude, I welcome the budget and I support the motion on the bill at stage 1.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I am sorry. There is no time in hand, so I have to be quite strict. I do not know why it always lands in my lap, but there we go.

16:00

**Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** It is the strength of our union that has allowed us to weather the storm of this crisis and deliver unprecedented funding during the pandemic, and that is reflected in the Scottish budget boost. We are seeing an increase in funding of 11 per cent on last year as a result, bringing the resource budget to just shy of £38 billion and allowing the SNP to agree to a number of the Scottish Conservatives’ budget priorities.

We are grateful for Kate Forbes’s engagement in the process. The overall spending outlook for Scotland for 2020-21 is better than it has been for some time, which is due in large part to the £9.7 billion in Barnett consequential from the UK Government. That is more funding for the NHS and for supporting most businesses across Scotland.

We analyse the budget today, at stage 1, believing that this was Kate Forbes’s chance to provide our fantastic local authorities with much-needed help at a time of national crisis, but I believe that the budget is short-sighted. For the past 14 years, the SNP has raided council budgets—[*Interruption.*]—I am sorry about that ringing, Presiding Officer.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You are having a bit of a musical accompaniment. I hope that somebody has found out whose it is.

**Rachael Hamilton:** It is actually a timer.

For the past 14 years, the SNP has raided council budgets, which has run down the ability of local authorities to react to the ravages of inclement weather by repairing potholes the size of craters on our roads or progressing essential flood-risk defences. Ms Forbes may remember that, in 2018, the Scottish Conservatives called for a £100 million pothole action fund. However, years later, there is still no extra support for local authorities to deal with crumbling roads. Further, the Scottish Government must recognise that we are experiencing extreme weather patterns and that an extra £150 million for flood-risk management is perhaps not enough, considering the damage that has been done to the homes of my constituents in Newcastleton in the past 24 hours, for example.

In her summing-up, I urge the finance secretary to say whether the SNP will support a fair funding settlement for local authorities. The Scottish Conservatives want funding for councils whereby they receive a set amount of the Scottish Government’s budget each year, mirroring the block grant from the UK Government. A fair funding settlement would also address concerns over the sustainability of essential youth programmes and projects that are delivered by local authorities. I appreciate that this has not all happened on the finance secretary’s watch, but, for the past 14 years, the SNP has raided council budgets to pay for its own failed bailouts and botched projects.

The amount of money that the SNP has given to local authorities has fallen by £276 million in real terms since 2013-14, which has run down local services such as youth groups and initiatives. According to Unison’s recent report, youth services are at breaking point and youth service

spending in Scotland has been cut by over £11 million in the past three years alone. A report on a YouthLink Scotland member survey from June 2019 also showed a funding crisis in the sector. We know that all of that is having a disproportionate impact on young people from deprived backgrounds. Compounded by the pandemic, things are, sadly, only going to deteriorate further unless councils are given the funding that they deserve to restore services.

We will not support the budget at stage 1 tonight, because, without a doubt, this SNP budget offers little hope for local authorities that they can provide the essential services that are required to support the most vulnerable people in our communities as we rebuild our way out of the pandemic.

16:03

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** As has been said already, the timing of the budget this year is very far from ideal. I accept that it has been incredibly difficult, over the past 12 months, for the Westminster and Holyrood Governments to plan far ahead, so I understand why the UK Government is having its budget at this point. However, quite frankly, that is still not acceptable. How can any of the devolved Governments properly set a budget when we do not know what the UK budget contains? In particular, it is essential that we know personal allowances and other aspects of income tax, as income tax is not a fully devolved tax and we can vary only certain parts of it. Clearly, the normal approach should be that the UK sets its budget first, we follow, and then local government builds on that afterwards.

On the question of a Scotland-specific economic shock, we face the slightly odd situation that the requirements for such a shock have been triggered but it does not seem that there has actually been such a shock. That seems to be because of timing differences between the Office for Budget Responsibility and Scottish Fiscal Commission forecasts. It means that we have more flexibility for the next three years, which is welcome, although that will need to be addressed in the budget for 2024-25. However, that clearly was not the scenario that was expected when the fiscal framework was put in place. Both Governments were trying to cater for a situation in which the Scottish economy took a hit that did not impact on the UK as a whole—or, at least, not to the same extent.

That shows that it is impossible to foresee all that might occur when any fiscal framework is put in place or when it is reviewed, as our fiscal framework is expected to be fairly soon. When the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development reviewed the Scottish Fiscal

Commission, it commented that we already have one of the most complex fiscal frameworks in the world. We also heard from the Citizens Assembly of Scotland that a recurring theme was that the public do not understand our tax system. I therefore appeal to both Governments to make any renewed fiscal framework as fair as possible, certainly, and to consider whether they can make it simpler and more understandable. One aim of the settlement is that the public are able to hold the Government accountable for a particular decision, but, frankly, I do not consider that that is happening at the moment.

One of the most important sections of the Finance and Constitution Committee's report is between pages 26 and 27: it is headed "A Fair and Equal Economic Recovery", with the subheading "Differential Social and Economic Impact". It seems clear that Covid-19 has made existing structural inequalities worse. The incomes of some people—in particular, the better off—have been largely unaffected by the economic downturn, whereas people on low or precarious incomes have been hit harder. That needs to be tackled through how we spend the resources that we have in the coming year—as I believe has been done in the current year—and through what we do with taxation in future years. If I get to speak in the debate that follows this one, I will touch more on that.

I want to refer to the debate that we had yesterday on local government. It is all well and fine to want a more fixed settlement for councils, but, if they are to receive more money, some other sector will receive less, and that is likely to be the NHS. I accept that the NHS has been treated relatively generously in recent years. In effect, the Conservatives are saying that the NHS has received too much funding in recent years and that local authorities have not received enough. That is a perfectly valid argument, although I am not sure that the Conservatives have actually said that at the time of previous budgets. They cannot ask only for more spending for councils; in order to be believed, they need to say that that means less for the NHS.

If members got as far as pages 39 and 40 of the Finance and Constitution Committee's report, they would come to the section on the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body. Among other things, that section refers to MSP staff cost provision, which is planned to rise from £18 million by £5.8 million.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You must conclude.

**John Mason:** As the report says, that is justified because of rising workloads, but I have to say that I have slightly mixed feelings about it.

I support the budget.

16:08

**Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind):** I am grateful to the cabinet secretary for meeting me last week to discuss some of the budget issues. I hope that, by stage 3, she might be able to say a bit more about some of the issues that I raised with her, which I will reference in my speech today.

Willie Rennie alluded to the north-east of Scotland, and it will come as no surprise to members that I intend to focus the bulk of my remarks on the city of Aberdeen and the issues that have been faced here. On the face of it, the statistics for Aberdeen are bleak. The business rates increase in 2017, which was much rehearsed in the chamber, saw business rates in Aberdeen rise at a level that was 15 per cent above the national average. During the pandemic, 30 per cent of all notified redundancies in Scotland have been in Aberdeen city. Although 5,497 properties in Aberdeen sit under the £18,001 threshold for the small business bonus, only 2,190 receive the bonus. In percentage terms, 23 per cent of businesses in Aberdeen city received the small business bonus, against an average of 50 per cent across Scotland.

I raised with the cabinet secretary a number of things that could be considered in relation to the budget. The first concerns the welcome transitional relief that was introduced in 2017, following the revaluation. The multipliers on that transitional relief mean that the support that has been provided year on year has reduced, as was always the intention. However, because of the economic storm that has hit Aberdeen as a result of the coronavirus and the failure of the oil price to bounce back, there has been a double whammy for businesses in the area. Therefore, resetting the multipliers on the transitional relief so that it returns to 2017 levels could provide significant support for over 1,000 businesses in the north-east of Scotland.

Another thing that the cabinet secretary could do is consider the low uptake of the small business bonus in Aberdeen and understand what is driving that. Some businesses will undoubtedly fall outside the threshold as a result of the multiple properties issue, but I cannot believe that that applies to as many businesses as seem not to be receiving the funds. Work could be done with local agencies to increase the uptake of that vital support.

However, business rates are only one element. I believe that the Scottish Government needs to understand the wider issues around the costs of doing business, particularly for small businesses,

and how those could be relieved. Indeed, the Federation of Small Businesses has raised with me the fact that small businesses are keen to make a digital transition to more online ways of working but, with the recent digital boost funding having been snapped up in a matter of hours, many of them do not understand where they can get the support to enable that transition.

At the start of my speech, I mentioned the issue of redundancies. In the previous financial crisis, many people who were made redundant chose that moment to start their own businesses, and we may well see another surge in new start-ups as we move into the recovery phase. I seek assurances from the cabinet secretary that the Scottish Government and its agencies stand ready to support them and ensure that they have every possibility of success in the future.

16:12

**Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP):** I welcome the commitment to explore carers pay and look forward to the outcome of the talks that Kate Forbes is having with other parties on that matter. The issue will not be easy to deal with in the context of the UK's public sector pay freeze, and it should be noted that the budget sets out a distinctive Scottish pay policy that, again, supports the lowest paid, charting a very different course from that taken in the ill-judged UK pay freeze. I think that we all want social care workers to be properly rewarded, and I look forward to progress on that. If there is good will on all sides, I am sure that we can achieve it.

As the cabinet secretary has said, it is clear that she does not have all the tools that she needs to build the budget that she might want to deliver in an ideal world. All the UK Government spending in response to Covid and the consequentials that are subsequently passed to Scotland come from borrowing. The block on Scotland borrowing on the financial markets, or even using unspent capital funding, to address immediate needs is simply not acceptable.

Much has been said today about the generosity of the UK Government but, of course, it is our money that we are talking about, whether we pay it in taxes or take a share of borrowing that must be paid back. The cabinet secretary has also laid out clearly that much of the additional funding that has been allocated by the UK Government is short term and is restricted to addressing the pandemic and its fallout.

The £1.1 billion spending that was announced on 15 February is, of course, welcome, and I particularly welcome the additional £120 million for mental health, which is necessary, given the trauma faced by many people and the social

isolation imposed on them by the lockdown. I also very much welcome the extension of 100 per cent non-domestic rates relief for properties in the retail, hospitality, leisure and aviation sectors for all of 2021-22. As convener of the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee, I am acutely aware of the challenges that are faced by businesses in those sectors.

Tourism plays a proportionally larger role in Scotland's economy than it does in the economies of other UK nations and regions. It directly contributes 229,000 jobs, or 8.8 per cent of all Scottish employment. That reliance on the tourism sector makes Scotland particularly vulnerable to the consequences of the global pandemic.

A recent survey by the Scottish tourism emergency response group found that, out of 3,000 businesses that responded, a fifth of those that are still in operation have no cash reserves left. With the likely continuation of both international and domestic travel restrictions, the sector will face further pressures this year. I therefore welcome the additional £25 million of funding that was announced through VisitScotland business support schemes in February, which builds on the £104 million package of support for tourism and hospitality that was announced in December.

The UK Government needs to do more if we are to save our tourism infrastructure, and that is why I was pleased to hear that Kate Forbes had written to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, asking him to extend the furlough scheme beyond April, which all the tourism witnesses who came before the committee asked for.

I welcome this budget for recovery, and I urge everyone to support it. I welcome the Covid consequentialso far, although we all know that demand continues to outstrip resources, and the Scottish Government's inability to borrow on the financial markets or to use unspent capital funding to address what we need to spend now is completely unacceptable.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We now come to the closing speeches, starting with Claudia Beamish for Labour.

16:16

**Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab):** I welcome the cabinet secretary's continuing offer to support other parties in seeking consensus on the budget.

I start with Scottish Labour's call for radical action and up-front investment, on which the budget still needs to deliver if we are to kick-start a green jobs recovery and to set firm—[Inaudible.]—on the path of social justice—[Inaudible.]. Shovel-

ready energy efficiency programmes would mean skilled jobs creation—[Inaudible.]—poverty and—[Inaudible.].

Early action on—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Ms Beamish, could you stop a minute? You are breaking up. Could you switch the visuals off? The sound might then improve: sometimes that trick works. Much though we like to see you, this is so that we can hear you.

**Claudia Beamish:** Okay—thank you. I now just have the sound on. Is that better?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Indeed—it is wonderful.

**Claudia Beamish:** That is a relief—good.

Early action on retrofitting will secure local jobs, prevent rising long-term costs and tangibly improve the lives of many people. Although the £45 million of additional funding that has been announced is welcome, it does not go far enough to prevent the increasing costs of decarbonisation that will face everyone over time and increasing fuel poverty.

There is also an issue around the overall level of public investment that is required. With their combined expertise, the Existing Homes Alliance Scotland, WWF Scotland, Friends of the Earth and other organisations are calling for a doubling of the energy efficiency budget to £244 million for the next financial year, front-loading increased investment in the immediate term.

This year, Scotland hosts the 26th UN climate change conference of the parties—COP26—and its build-up. As the sub-state host, Scotland must set an example for the rest of the world to follow with its approach to support for other countries on the front line of climate impacts. Despite that—[Inaudible.]—£3 million, and non-governmental organisations have called for that to rise to £10 million in what is a very significant year. Scottish Labour was a key voice in the Parliament for securing climate justice under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, and the Scottish Government should play a leading role in that process.

In Scotland, the pandemic has exposed many pre-existing injustices, not least in the social care system. Scotland's current care system is not working, despite the hard work and commitment of those employed in the sector. Many communities across Scotland, including in my region, are rural. In the south of Scotland, people are struggling to access the care that they need.

A survey by the GMB union revealed that more than half of social care workers feel undervalued by the Scottish Government, and 98 per cent of social care workers feel that they are not paid

properly for their job. Despite the poverty pay that is endemic throughout the sector, those workers—many of them women, as Jackie Baillie stressed—have been at the forefront of caring for and protecting our loved ones in the present Covid crisis.

The SNP needs to show that it is serious about investing in social care. Our motion calls for exactly that in noting

“the calls for an immediate rise to £12 per hour for all social care workers followed by a review to establish steps to increase this to £15 an hour to fully recognise the value of their work.”

Jackie Baillie highlighted the cabinet secretary’s offer to continue to discuss the issue. If the Scottish Government supports that call, Labour will support the budget at stage 3. Scottish Labour is clear that transformation in social care is essential and that we must put people before profits.

We need to continue to discuss our other calls for funding in the budget. On local government, this year’s budget still falls short of a fair funding settlement, with councils left to foot the bill for their response to the pandemic. We cannot have a strong, green, fair economic recovery without well-resourced local government. It is central to supporting and growing local economies through direct and indirect job creation, local investment and regeneration; I emphasise that it is also central to reducing inequality.

In my region, the SNP administration in South Lanarkshire Council consulted on the closure of seven community libraries and cuts to school janitors. Those proposals were taken off the table following pressure from the Labour group, but the SNP administration and the Tories still voted for an austerity budget, rejecting Scottish Labour’s alternative.

There is an alternative to austerity, such as the successful approach of the Scottish Labour administration in North Ayrshire Council, where regional and anchor organisations support local businesses to bid for public sector contracts, and where co-operatives, employee ownership and social enterprises are encouraged. Money stays in the local economy.

As Jackie Baillie stressed, the pandemic has exposed the inequalities in our society, which have been here for far too long. As we look to recover from the Covid crisis, Scotland needs robust investment and support where it really matters, and Scottish Labour is arguing for that today. Cuts are not the answer to the crisis.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you Ms Beamish, and—

**Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con):** On a point of order—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I will just finish this point.

Thank you for your perseverance, Ms Beamish—we did hear you much better.

**Jackson Carlaw:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I realise that these are unusual times, but a member who makes a speech during a debate from their place in the chamber is normally expected to return to hear the closing speeches in that same debate. Can you confirm whether that is no longer the current convention?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That is the convention, but if members indicate to me—unfortunately, they cannot send notes to the chair now—that they require to leave the chamber briefly, I usually let that happen. If you have observed that happening, it was with my permission.

I call Maurice Golden to close for the Conservatives.

16:22

**Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con):** Kate Forbes said in her opening speech that her

“overarching objective is to support the people of Scotland”.

We agree on that.

I pay tribute to Bruce Crawford for his stewardship of the Finance and Constitution Committee, as well as for his contributions in the chamber and for being such a statesperson, which is something that we should all strive to achieve.

I welcome the positive measures in the budget, many of which can be delivered only as a result of Scotland’s being part of Britain, as Murdo Fraser highlighted in a rip-roaring speech that referred to

“the broad shoulders and the deep pockets of the British Government”.

My colleague Jamie Halcro Johnston echoed that and outlined how the Scottish Government is short-changing our agricultural sector.

With regard to the positives, increased funding for the NHS is always welcome, and is especially so during the pandemic. Front-line staff and the army of support workers behind the scenes have, in the past year, gone above and beyond to care for us, so it is only right that we give them additional resources. Willie Rennie highlighted that mental health support should be part of that, as well.

The budget’s tax measures are also welcome. Individuals can look forward to a freeze on income tax rates, thanks to the efforts of the Scottish

Conservatives. We led the charge to prevent hard-pressed families' tax bills from rising again, as they have because of past SNP budgets. Thankfully, the SNP listened this time.

The extension of 100 per cent rates relief for retail, hospitality and leisure businesses is also welcome. Again, the Scottish Conservatives pushed for that, because we understand how vital such support is in order to protect jobs. That point was well made by Rachael Hamilton, who was accompanied by some music.

**Kate Forbes:** As Maurice Golden knows, I have extended non-domestic rates relief in advance of the UK Government doing so. Does that suggest that the SNP is a bit quicker off the mark in supporting businesses than is its counterpart south of the border, which has still not extended the furlough scheme or non-domestic rates relief?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** There is time for interventions.

**Maurice Golden:** I hoped that Kate Forbes was intervening to welcome the unprecedented funding from the British Government, which has allowed the Scottish Government to be so generous, in certain cases. The initial SNP plan was to terminate the support early; I know that it will not have been easy for ministers to make such a significant public U-turn. However, by following the Scottish Conservatives plan, more than 14,000 Scottish businesses are now better able to survive the crisis. That includes our newspaper industry, which employs 3,000 people. The Scottish Conservatives felt that the SNP plan to end rates relief early was simply too risky for those jobs. Again, we intervened and, again, we saw a welcome U-turn from the SNP.

Jackie Baillie spoke about a budget for recovery. I agree with her that the budget offers such an opportunity, but as yet fails to deliver it. Perhaps that is because many businesses, including supply chain businesses, are still struggling to access support. They do not all have premises, so they are refused hardship and temporary closure funding. They are left only with local authority discretionary funds, for which eligibility varies across Scotland. In Renfrewshire, the discretionary fund is open only to businesses that pay business rates, which puts those that do not have premises back to square 1.

In Inverness, an amusement supply chain company that employs 43 people has been unable to secure funding, and is struggling to survive. The trade body, the British Amusement Catering Trade Association, has called for a discrete support package to help. I urge ministers to reconsider their opposition to that.

A cleaning business that is based in Barrhead has seen its income levels drop by 85 per cent.

There is no guarantee that its hospitality-business clients will reopen fully at the end of April, and despite being the sole source of hygiene services to them, the business is not able to claim the strategic business framework grant because it is not classed as part of the supply chain. The business is not legally required to shut down, but it is not legally allowed to clean in people's homes and, as such, it falls through the cracks. The local discretionary grant is only a one-off £2,000, which does not even touch the sides. Job losses are imminent. Many more businesses—too many to mention—are in the same position.

On the route map to recovery, the Scottish Chambers of Commerce said that

"it does not go as far or as fast as the Prime Minister did towards clarifying when we can get back to business".

Derek Provan, who is the chief executive of AGS Airports Ltd, said:

"the First Minister provided a clear message the aviation industry is not a priority for the Scottish Government. We received no plan or framework against which we can start plotting any form of recovery."

The Scottish Wedding Industry Alliance, which I assume is now close to the cabinet secretary's heart, reports that the sector is in free-fall and is losing £6.5 million a day. January alone accounted for £205 million in lost business. Couples have lost hope—they cannot put their lives on hold any longer, and they do not believe that they will be able any time this year to have the weddings that they have dreamed of.

The budget choices show the SNP's true character. Jobs, housing, transport, councils, a green recovery and even victims of crime—none of them are as important to the SNP as holding another, potentially illegal, referendum. There is still time for the SNP to do the right thing and defund referendum preparations, give councils the resources that they need and protect as many jobs as possible.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you very much, Mr Golden. You kept going, heroically, despite heckling from your neighbour. I call Kate Forbes to close for the Scottish Government.

16:30

**Kate Forbes:** I am so glad that this has been a relatively traditional budget debate, in which the only party to mention independence has, of course, been the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party.

The past 12 months have been extraordinary and, as we approach the end of the parliamentary session, it is essential that we demonstrate unity for the people in Scotland and deliver the Scottish budget that is required to continue Scotland's

recovery from the pandemic. As we have heard, there are different nuances on the priorities and different concerns, but I think that we are all relatively agreed, right now, on what the priorities are. That is why the budget that I have presented to the Parliament will fund our key priorities for people, businesses and communities throughout Scotland. It also provides us with the opportunity to demonstrate how we work together as a Parliament to support Scotland through the most difficult of times.

In the first few minutes of my speech, I pay tribute, as others have done, to Bruce Crawford. I do not think that this will be the last time that we hear from him; I am sure that he will be back for stage 3. However, it is helpful to reflect on the fact that the reports of the Finance and Constitution Committee and most others have been consensual in their commentary on the budget that the Scottish Government has presented and on the priorities. The committee's report, to which I will respond, highlighted the challenges of the fiscal framework that John Mason picked up on—that it has not met the challenges of Covid-related funding and that there is a need for a review, which I hope that all parties can get behind in the coming months.

I think that the budget demonstrates that either we can rise to the occasion, find consensus and make compromises, or we can just resort to the politics. Tom Arthur talked about what can be achieved in good faith. Consensus delivers results. Willie Rennie and the Liberal Democrats have demonstrated that in securing funding in the budget for their ambition on mental health and for the delivery of certain policies on education recovery.

Given that we have been a minority Government for the past few years, there has been an opportunity every year for parties to secure concessions, find compromise, negotiate on their priorities and secure improvements to the budget. It is very easy to criticise and to rail against the Government; it is far harder to solve problems and provide solutions. The budget enables every party—and indeed every member—to provide those solutions every year. Patrick Harvie, as he said, has done that on behalf of the Scottish Green Party in the past few years. He has delivered substantial changes to the budget every year. This year, he identified the need to support household incomes in order to tackle inequalities, and he talked about public sector pay. We have already delivered on some of that, and I am open to continuing discussions on other things.

The Tories listed all the great things in the budget—that is great and I might clip that speech for Twitter tonight. There are in the budget a lot of great things on which the people of Scotland

depend, and a lot of elements for which businesses and communities have asked. However, of course, those elements will be delivered only if the budget is passed, as I put to Murdo Fraser. Again, it is one thing to call for things but, when they are delivered, it is quite remarkable then to vote against them.

The Conservatives also talked, as they do generally, about the deep pockets of the union. In fact, it is the deep overdrafts of the union. One wonders how every other country around the world has funded its own Covid response without being part of this great United Kingdom, but, of course, they have done it in exactly the same way as the UK Government, which is through borrowing, at record low levels of interest. It is well documented that the Scottish Government cannot borrow and is therefore reliant on when and whether the UK Government comes to a decision on policies and generates Barnett consequentials.

**Murdo Fraser:** If we were not part of Britain, with the ability to borrow very cheaply on the international markets because of the strength of British financial institutions and the fifth-largest economy in the world, in what currency would we be borrowing money?

**Kate Forbes:** We have been very clear that the currency of an independent Scotland would be the currency that we have right now, which is the pound. Other small countries around the world have been able to borrow at record low interests and in some cases at negative interest rates. Meanwhile, I have had to wait for the UK Government to come to a decision on a policy that then generates funding that we can then apply to our decisions, and now we see it deviating completely from the Barnett formula and choosing to spend directly in devolved areas. Getting rid of the Barnett formula is an issue that has also raised concern in Wales and Northern Ireland among parties of a very different political persuasion.

Other members have made important points. I want to close with comments that were made by Tom Arthur and Annabelle Ewing, because they talked about the fact that, although there are big numbers in the budget, it is about the impact on real people, schools, children and young people. Within the constraints of every budget, which is required to be balanced, we have had to prioritise and make choices, and we have chosen to prioritise against our three objectives—the economic recovery, responding to the health pandemic and tackling health inequalities. This is a budget that responds to the moment. It includes support for business. Maurice Golden talked about the need to support the wedding industry, and the Scottish Government is the only Government in the UK that is supporting that industry.

The budget also sets the framework and the foundation stones for recovery over the coming year, because we need hope. We need to be bold and ambitious, and I am open, as I have been throughout the past few weeks, to working with other parties to ensure that we can be as ambitious and bold as possible in responding not only to the requests from across the chamber but, ultimately, to the needs of the people of Scotland, who depend on the Parliament to work together and deliver a budget.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes the debate on the Budget (Scotland) (No 5) Bill.

## Scottish Income Tax Rate Resolution 2021-22

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-24225, in the name of Kate Forbes, on the Scottish income tax rate resolution. Members should note that the question on the motion will be put immediately following the conclusion of the debate. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak button. I call Ivan McKee to speak to and move the motion.

I am happy to be corrected. I am only reading what is written for me; I am not in charge. I call the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Kate Forbes, to move the motion, which will be spoken to by Ivan McKee. Have I got that right now?

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Kate Forbes):** Apparently so.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that, for the purposes of section 11A of the Income Tax Act 2007 (which provides for income tax to be charged at Scottish rates on certain non-savings and non-dividend income of a Scottish taxpayer), the Scottish rates and limits for the tax year 2021-22 are as follows—

- (a) a starter rate of 19%, charged on income up to a limit of £2,097,
- (b) the Scottish basic rate is 20%, charged on income above £2,097 and up to a limit of £12,726,
- (c) an intermediate rate of 21%, charged on income above £12,726 and up to a limit of £31,092,
- (d) a higher rate of 41%, charged on income above £31,092 and up to a limit of £150,000, and
- (e) a top rate of 46%, charged on income above £150,000.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That is excellent—off we go.

16:37

**The Minister for Trade, Innovation and Public Finance (Ivan McKee):** I had checked the choreography with my officials earlier. The process is apparently that the cabinet secretary moves then I speak to the motion. I am delighted to open part 2 of this afternoon's fiscal double header, for those who are gluttons for punishment.

First, I draw Parliament's attention to the procedural connection between the debate and rule 9.16.7 of the standing orders, which states that a rate resolution must be agreed before stage 3 of the budget bill is able to proceed. As members will be aware, the debate on the rate resolution normally takes place following stage 2 of the budget bill, but today's debate is taking place after stage 1.

Any further delay would have left business and payroll operators with insufficient time to ensure that their systems would be ready ahead of the start of the new tax year on 6 April. We have brought forward today's debate to alleviate any further disruption to them and in recognition that people need stability from the tax system now more than ever before.

The fact remains that had the United Kingdom Government been able to set its budget in timely fashion, businesses and employers would not have faced this uncertainty in the first place. In contrast with the indecision of the UK Government, our budget offers Scotland's people and businesses certainty and stability in times that are anything but certain. On every page of the budget can be seen decisions that have been taken with the coronavirus pandemic to the fore: spending prioritised for the industries hardest hit, support for our national health service and investment in the future of our economy. Those decisions have been taken without our having the full picture of funding available to us.

We have been clear that this budget supports Scotland's people and the economic recovery for this year and beyond; it will provide certainty and stability in the face of the disarray that is caused by Brexit, at the hands of the UK Government.

In 2017, the Scottish Government set out its vision for a fairer and more progressive income tax system in Scotland. At the time, a commitment was made that the new five-band system would remain in place for the duration of this parliamentary session. The proposals that we are debating today deliver on that commitment and maintain our fairer and progressive tax system. Under those proposals, all income tax rates will remain unchanged; the starter and basic rate bands, as well as the higher rate threshold, will increase by inflation; and the top-rate threshold will remain frozen at £150,000.

During our pre-budget engagement, we heard a clear message from stakeholders across the country that now is not the time to make significant changes to taxes and that, instead, we should focus on supporting the people and businesses that are hardest hit by the pandemic.

Leading fiscal commentators, such as the International Monetary Fund and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, agree that now is not the time to balance the books. We, too, have been clear that now is not the time for fiscal consolidation. This budget is about striking the right balance between raising the revenue that is required to fund our public services and providing certainty for all Scottish taxpayers.

Our proposed tax package has been supported by key stakeholders. David Lonsdale of the Scottish Retail Consortium wrote that

"decisions to protect ordinary taxpayers from rises in income tax rates...are spot on".

Professor Graeme Roy from the Fraser of Allander institute said that this wise package provides certainty and stability to households and families who are living in very uncertain times. Our proposals for income tax deliver that certainty and stability.

This Government is committed to ensuring that tax policy is understood and informed by a diverse range of views and perspectives. We have committed to delivering a transparent and outward-focused tax policy making process. We embrace a collaborative approach to tax policy development, which is characterised by regular consultation with taxpayers, industry representatives and professional bodies.

Ahead of the budget, we engaged with a diverse range of stakeholders on tax policy. That engagement included a pre-budget consultation, which showed a broad-ranging interest in the devolution of further tax powers and an appetite for broader engagement on tax.

We listened to the interest in further devolution of tax powers that has been expressed by stakeholders and, as part of the medium-term financial strategy, we called for the UK Government to use the upcoming fiscal framework review to consider that. That call includes devolving a package of taxes, encompassing full income tax powers and full value added tax devolution, as well as consideration of other tax powers, such as capital gains tax and national insurance. Those powers would enable the Scottish Government to shape a recovery that is best suited to Scotland. We believe that broad-based engagement of that kind should not be limited to the annual budget cycle, but should form part of a wider conversation about the purpose of tax in our society, and what tax is designed to achieve.

Members will know that the Finance and Constitution Committee, in its "Report on Scottish Government Budget 2021-22" this week, called for

"a national conversation jointly led by the Government and Parliament and which includes a wide range of voices across Scotland."

Although I believe that he may be back for stage 3, I pay tribute to Bruce Crawford and the efforts that he made to encourage me when I first came into this Parliament and sat on his esteemed committee.

We welcome that call from the committee and will work constructively with its successor

committee to ensure that the conversation is well-grounded and valuable to the public of Scotland.

The findings of that conversation will be considered as part of the pre-budget scrutiny of future years, but we want that national engagement on taxes to broaden understanding of the links between tax and spend, and the central role of taxes in Scotland's finances.

We want to look afresh at the social contract that underpins tax and spend and allows Scotland's taxpayers to continue to have access to a wider and better-funded range of free-to-access public services than in the rest of UK, making Scotland an attractive place to live, work, study and do business. Those taxes support our national health service and the industries that are hardest hit by the pandemic and they deliver for Scotland.

As this parliamentary session draws to an end, it is a good opportunity to reflect on what our decisions on income tax have delivered for Scotland. People in Scotland pay their income tax in the most progressive and fair tax system anywhere in the UK; it protects low-income earners and raises additional revenue to fund public services.

Our decisions mean that, for the fourth consecutive year, Scotland will be the lowest taxed part of the UK for the majority of income tax payers. We continue to ask those with the broadest shoulders to contribute more but, in return, people who live in Scotland continue to have access to the widest range of public services available anywhere in the UK. That is progressive tax policy in action.

Members will be aware that income tax outturn data is available only after a significant time lag. Therefore it was not until September last year that we got the first insight into the results of our income tax reform in 2018-19. That data showed that Scottish tax receipts grew faster between 2017-18 and 2018-19 than those in the rest of the UK. As a result, Scotland raised £119 million over and above the corresponding block grant adjustment, largely thanks to our policy changes. That positive outlook has continued into 2019-20. Data published recently by HM Revenue and Customs suggests that Scottish receipts between 2018-19 and 2019-20 continued to grow faster than those in the rest of the UK.

If we look across this parliamentary session, the latest forecasts from the Scottish Fiscal Commission and the Office for Budget Responsibility tell us that, over the five years following 2017-18, Scottish income tax is expected to raise around £930 million more than the corresponding block grant adjustments. That is extra money that we have been able to invest in our national health service and our education

system and in tackling the climate emergency. There can be no firmer evidence that our tax policies are delivering for the people of Scotland.

I recognise that people across the country are dealing with the significant economic and social impacts brought on by the pandemic. They need certainty and stability from their tax system. This policy delivers just that.

16:46

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):**

It is a peculiarity of the budget process that we have to set the rate resolution before our final vote on the budget. We do not yet know the final overall size of the budget, or how it will be allocated.

However, this is an important part of the process: if we did not agree on a rate resolution, no income tax would be collected at all in Scotland. Some of my colleagues might welcome that prospect. It might give an interesting foretaste of what an independent Scotland might look like, with a large black hole in the public finances, but it is probably not a responsible way in which to proceed, at present.

As we consider our approach to the rate resolution, let us not forget that the Scottish National Party was elected on a manifesto promise not to raise taxes. In its 2016 manifesto it pledged to

"freeze the basic rate of income tax throughout the next Parliament to protect those on low and middle incomes".

Nicola Sturgeon herself has said:

"I have been very clear that the government will not increase income tax".—[*Official Report*, 2 February 2017; c 10.]

I could bore the chamber for hours with similar quotations from SNP figures, perhaps even from the finance secretary herself, making similar pledges, all of which have now been broken.

Everyone who earns more than around £27,000 pays more tax than their equivalent south of the border. Many of those who are paying much more are basic-rate taxpayers. There is also, as we have often raised, particular concern about those who earn between £43,000 and £50,000, who pay tax at a marginal rate of more than 50 per cent. That is a disincentive to people in that tax bracket to work harder.

That is not the only tax promise that the SNP has broken. It also promised at election time to raise the personal allowance to £12,750. That is another pledge that the SNP has broken: we have had two broken tax promises in the course of one session of Parliament.

That said, I welcome the fact that we will not have further tax increases in the current year.

Although that does not narrow the gap between Scotland and the rest of the UK, at least it does not make matters worse.

It is classic Keynesian economics to increase spending and reduce taxation at a time of economic downturn. The Scottish Government is not choosing to reduce taxation; we will see what the Chancellor of the Exchequer decides to do for the other parts of the UK in his budget next week. To increase taxes at this time would go against all orthodox economic thinking. The minister gave a nod to that idea in his remarks. This is not the time for fiscal consolidation. That might be different in the long run. We await what the chancellor announces in the UK Budget next week, but I would be very surprised if he took any steps to increase personal taxation at this time.

In subsequent years, the story might be different. There might be a need to increase taxes in order to reduce borrowing and then to start to make repayments, but now is not the time to do that. In that respect, the minister and I are in the same place; we agree with that general approach. It remains to be seen whether that meeting of minds will last much longer. For now, we agree that that is a sensible approach to taxation.

However, we would prefer it if we were going further towards meeting tax rates in the rest of the UK, because we have to be very careful about increasing tax divergence between Scotland and down south. Scotland needs to be a competitive place to live, work and do business. Our aspiration as a party is for taxes in Scotland to be competitive relative to those in the rest of the UK. That is how we will attract people to come to live in Scotland, and that ambition is as important now as it ever was.

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** Will the member give way?

**Murdo Fraser:** If I have time, I will give way.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You will get your time back, Mr Fraser.

**John Mason:** Does Murdo Fraser accept that people are attracted to Scotland for a range of reasons? For most people, the tax rate is not the dominant reason. They come here for the quality of education, the quality of the health service and the friendly people.

**Murdo Fraser:** Mr Mason is right that there are all sorts of factors that lead to people coming to and leaving Scotland. However, if I were him, I would be very nervous about praising the quality of Scotland's education system, given what we have heard from all the academics and experts who have compared the recent performance of Scotland's education system with performance in other parts of the world. We seem to be slipping

down international league tables. There is a lot of work to do if we are to make Scotland as attractive as it should be to people who want to come here to educate their children.

I will say a little bit about the fiscal framework, which was mentioned in the previous debate but is also relevant to this one. The fiscal framework protects public spending in Scotland, provided that tax revenues in Scotland remain similar to those in other parts of the UK. That is important, and will be particularly important if we end up with a shrinking economy and a falling set of tax revenues. The finance secretary would not have to worry about a falling budget in that scenario, because her budget is protected from reductions, unlike the budgets in all the other countries that she likes to talk about, which face a squeeze on their income. The fiscal framework—which, of course, the Deputy First Minister negotiated on behalf of the Scottish Government—protects the levels of spending in Scotland, and we should welcome that.

In the current year's budget, the finance secretary has had to account for £300 million of negative reconciliations arising from overestimation of taxes raised during the 2018-19 budget period. The fiscal framework allows the Scottish Government to borrow money in order to fill that hole, which is a very welcome initiative.

We know that the tax changes that the SNP Government introduced have not raised as much money as it predicted they would. I remember, when the tax changes were introduced by the finance secretary's predecessor, his claims that they would raise up to £600 million—more than half a billion pounds. In his opening remarks, however, the minister gave the game away. In the past year, the tax changes raised only £119 million, which is much less than was originally claimed. That suggests that raising taxes is not a one-way bet in raising additional revenue, as the minister seemed to suggest.

**Ivan McKee:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Murdo Fraser:** I will, if I have time.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The minister must be very brief.

**Ivan McKee:** I will clarify the point that I made. I said that the £119 million reflects the better performance of income tax raising in Scotland than that in the rest of the UK, which adds up to a total of £930 million over this parliamentary session. That is a positive reflection of the Government's tax policies over the period.

**Murdo Fraser:** That was a very long intervention. If the minister checks the record, he will see that he said—I listened to him very

carefully—that the £119 million included the revenue from the tax changes that were made.

We cannot support the rate resolution that is before us, because it does not go far enough, but we will not oppose it. Governments have a duty to levy taxes to pay for public services. Without the rate resolution being passed, that would not be possible. We will therefore abstain in order to let the rate resolution pass.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** There is some time for interventions.

16:54

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** Since the Government took charge of Scottish income tax rates, Labour members have been critical of how it has used the powers. For years, the SNP demanded that income tax rates should be devolved so that it could introduce more progressive policies. However, since the SNP has taken charge, we have not seen much more than tinkering around the edges.

I know that the finance secretary will probably tell me that the most well-off taxpayers in Scotland will be paying more than they would in England. I know that she will probably also say that the Government has introduced additional rates and bands. However, in the application of those powers, year after year, it has failed to make the most of them. This year, we see the conclusion of that timid approach, with the lowest earners being given a tax cut that is effectively worth 12p, while the top earners—those bringing in more than £150,000 per year—get a cut worth £33. How is that progressive? How can it be that the Government is proposing income tax rates that provide so little help to those on the lowest pay? Many of them are the very workers whom the Government applauded during the pandemic.

We know that this year's tax rates are a holding position in advance of an election that is just weeks away, as the Government anticipates more money coming from the UK Treasury to fill the gap. The budget proposals therefore tell us very little about how the Government might approach the recovery from coronavirus in the years ahead.

It would be unacceptable for the burden of the crisis to fall on those with lowest incomes. Although many people on higher incomes have managed to save more over the past year, that is not true for those on low incomes, many of whom have struggled to make ends meet. In the coming years, the Government cannot replicate this year's approach and hand a larger saving to those who already have far more to fall back on. I therefore welcome the fact that low earners will not see a tax rise next year, and that is why Labour has also welcomed the council tax freeze. When people are

facing such a strain on their family finances, we cannot—and should not—ask them to pay more, particularly at a time when the Scottish Government is benefiting from UK Government borrowing at historically low levels.

However, I ask the finance secretary to consider carefully in future how she matches her words about progressive taxation with action. It is only because of the significant increases in spending available from UK Government borrowing that she can meet all her commitments this year. In future years that may not be as readily available and, at that time, the burden cannot fall other than on those with the broadest shoulders.

The coming years will challenge the Government to be more radical and more innovative with public finances. If it wants to maintain all the commitments that it has made, money will have to be found somewhere. We know that the Government already plans to borrow in order to deal with negative income tax reconciliations in future years. We also know that the cabinet secretary has been seeking additional borrowing powers from the UK Government as part of the fiscal framework review.

However, if we are to have sustainable public finances that can provide the basis for economic growth in Scotland, borrowing and taxation will not go far enough. The finance secretary needs to take action to restart our economy and, at the very least, catch us up with the rest of the UK. The medium-term financial strategy makes it abundantly clear that the Scottish Government is overreliant on tax receipts from sectors that are disproportionately affected by Covid-19.

Recovery will mean redressing that balance. It will also mean planning for an economy that is going to look very different from the one that we had before coronavirus. The Government cannot make the same mistakes that it did after the last financial crisis, such that Scotland was still trying to catch up more than 10 years on from that shock. We cannot afford another anaemic recovery.

Labour will not vote against the rates resolution today. However, we do so with a warning that the Government cannot continue with a piecemeal approach to taxation and our overall economy. For future prosperity, we must grow our tax base, help low earners and small businesses, and ask those with the broadest shoulders to contribute a fair share.

16:59

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** This is like a blast from the past—the debates of yesteryear, when we used to argue about tax rises and whether we would get extra revenues or

whether there would be a massive cut to public services as a result. It is great to be back in such an atmosphere—we often forget about the debates that we used to have.

However, we should remember that, at the last election, the SNP did not propose a tax rise but then went on to increase it—unlike the Scottish Liberal Democrats, who were honest about the election. We said that we should put a penny on income tax, which would be a modest rise for a colossal return that we could invest in education, and we followed through on that view later.

We should also remember that the Conservatives were dead against any tax rise. Murdo Fraser corroborated that today. However, it is quite interesting that he is not proposing to reverse the tax rise. So appalled is he by it that he has decided to leave it alone. I have seen no proposal from the Conservatives to reverse the tax rise. In fact, I remember having a debate with Jamie Greene during the election campaign in which he was unable to say whether he would cut the tax or reverse it. That is how confused the Conservatives are about whether they support it or not.

Nevertheless, we have moved on slightly. This year, it is important that we have stability. I do not think that the public have any appetite at all for tax increases at this time. Consumer confidence is really fragile and we need to make sure that, in the middle of the pandemic, when people's personal finances are tight, we give them the support that they need. To be frank, when we are borrowing such colossal sums of money, any tax rise would be just a drop in the ocean in comparison. There is no appetite for tax rises, and that is why we will support the Scottish rate resolution today.

There is also a wider lesson that we need to learn. Budget debates in the Parliament have changed. In previous years, we debated with the thought in our minds about who would benefit from extra funds or be affected by a cut in services. That was almost our sole interest. Now, we are at least thinking about the taxpayer's pocket and we have to balance those two considerations much more effectively. That is why our debates on budgets and rate resolutions are much more rounded and considered. We think about all the different interest groups in our considerations, which makes this a much healthier place. In the past, we just argued about where the extra money would go or where the cuts would be made. That has changed, and it is a healthy change.

There is another argument, although it will take longer for us to make the proper assessments in this area. When we introduce tax rises, we need to make sure that their intended effects follow. We need to measure the impact and the outcomes for individuals and examine any behavioural change.

Many claims are made about changes that would result from a tax rise, and we need to measure all that. That will be difficult because the pandemic has intervened, but I believe that, as a discipline, we should test the impacts and examine the claims that are made about behavioural change.

As far as I saw, we did not have mass behavioural change in the pre-pandemic period. We did not have people exiting Scotland to go somewhere else because of modest tax rises. However, that trust is fragile. We need to be careful when we make decisions about taxes so that we maintain the taxpayer's trust and confidence.

17:03

**Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** The current session of the Parliament has seen the only substantial tax reform since devolution, with a new, five-band system of income tax that is closely modelled on what the Scottish Greens proposed at the previous election. It is worth recalling, as some other speakers have done, what the other parties proposed at that point. Labour and the Lib Dems wanted to raise income tax at the basic rate, increasing what low earners—those who can least afford it—would pay. The Conservatives, naturally, wanted big tax cuts for the richest, which would be funded by cuts to the public services that everybody else depends on.

The SNP, meanwhile, proposed only the most timid possible change by not copying the UK Government's ideas. It also wanted a new, extra personal tax allowance for Scotland, which would have mostly benefited high-income households and would have given nothing at all to those who are in most need. I am very pleased that we not only blocked that damaging proposal but shifted the debate on tax completely and won through with the Green proposal to raise more revenue from those who can afford it while protecting everybody on low or middle incomes.

Has that change gone as far as it could or as far as we would like? It has not, and the SNP's return to threshold increases that benefit high earners is not something that we support. However, in the middle of the pandemic, I have to accept that this is not the time for a further radical shake-up of the system. We will not vote for the rate resolution motion, but we will allow it to go through to prevent the budget as a whole from falling.

Let me say something about the future. As the Finance and Constitution Committee has agreed, we need to re-examine the persistent structural inequalities in our society, which have been exacerbated by the current crisis. As Bruce Crawford said in the stage 1 budget debate, that means redistribution. It means closing the wealth

and income inequality gap in our society. If we are going to do that, yes, we need a national conversation, but we need a deep re-examination of the role of tax policy. We need that in Scotland and in the UK but, actually, all Governments are going to have to look creatively at the role of tax in the coming fiscal consolidation, instead of returning to the brutality of austerity.

That must mean dropping the silly, shallow rhetoric that we keep on hearing in claims about being the highest or lowest-taxed part of the UK. That kind of language is grounded in the idea of tax competition—the idea that each jurisdiction must compete to be the lowest-taxed area. Tax competition is one of the things that have led to the growth of inequality and the hoarding of wealth by the few. The implication of that kind of language is that tax is a bad thing in principle, and we are going to have to reject that.

The deep re-examination of tax policy that we need must mean looking again at income tax for high earners, and it must mean finally addressing the long-overdue reform of local taxation. It should also kill off the SNP's absurd decision to back Tory free-market extremism with free ports—a system that is designed to remove economic activity from the tax base. Finally, it must mean raising revenues from the Covid profiteers and tackling the legal tax avoidance that takes place on such a huge scale by vastly profitable businesses and bringing corporate profits back into the scope of taxation after decades of tax cuts for those who need them the least.

We will make a case for radical proposals in the next session. For the time being, we will abstain on the rate resolution motion today.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to the open debate. There is a little time in hand for interventions.

17:07

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** We now move on to the other side of the budget equation: where the money is to come from to pay for the expenditure that we need and want. I have to say that I agree with quite a lot of what Patrick Harvie said. As a country, we need to become more comfortable talking about tax and not just in the sense that it is a bad thing and that we all want all taxes to be as low as possible.

I regularly receive campaign emails from various sources, which have recently included Unite the union, which has been campaigning about caring for carers, and Unison, which has been calling for an NHS pay rise. Both are seeking better pay and conditions for low-paid workers, and I have a lot of sympathy for those campaigns, but neither suggested raising tax to pay for such increased

expenditure. It was as if the money could somehow appear without there being an impact anywhere else.

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

**John Mason:** I will not, after Mr Findlay's insult to the cabinet secretary.

The section on tax policy in the Finance and Constitution Committee's report—paragraphs 167 to 178—which has been referred to, is well worth reading. It calls for an inquiry into and a debate on a Scottish approach to taxation.

I accept that today we are specifically looking at income tax rates, but this seems like a good time to start thinking of the way ahead: the recovery from the pandemic and how tax fits as part of that. I think that there is an appetite among the public to support the NHS and pay more for care workers and care homes, and perhaps to pay more tax in order to fund those things. Even Scottish Chambers of Commerce agreed that it would support a debate on tax reform. After all, many businesses that have traditionally argued for lower taxes across the board have been very keen to receive funding from the public purse, which of course is funded by all of our taxes.

We have had a Citizens Assembly of Scotland report, and we had a debate on that last week. A key theme of that was the lack of understanding of taxation among the public. However, we know that 99 per cent of the public understand budgeting perfectly well. They have to juggle income and expenditure to get a balance, and they know that we in Parliament need to do so as well.

I very much support the call for the incoming members of Parliament and the incoming finance committee to consider an inquiry and a wider debate during 2021-22 so that the results can impact on the budget in 2023-24.

I turn to income tax more specifically. We heard from witnesses, including the Office for Budget Responsibility, that fiscal consolidation will be necessary in the medium term, particularly if interest rates rise and the cost of borrowing increases. I do not want to see public spending cut in either the UK or Scotland. At some point, we need to look at taxes, including income tax.

I take the point that we do not want to damage the recovery by raising taxes too soon and taking away money that might be better spent with businesses that are struggling. The Government makes the point that it wants to give certainty and stability, and I very much support that.

Thanks to an increase in the number of bands a while back—I accept that the Greens were part of that discussion—we have a more progressive system than the UK has. Some people are clearly

struggling financially, with the hospitality sector and much of retail still closed. Workers' hours are being reduced and, in particular, it is clear that women and low-paid workers have been suffering most. However, some people are better off because of Covid—that probably includes most members. People on fixed salaries have saved on commuting, meals, nights out, childcare and a range of other expenditure. Some people could therefore afford to pay a bit more tax.

I refer back to the previous debate and the importance of the differential social and economic impact of Covid. I believe that we need to look at increasing equality by targeting our expenditure at those who are most in need and by expecting those who are most able to contribute more to do so.

Overall, I am happy to support the Scottish rate resolution, but we need to look more closely at taxation in the medium to longer term.

17:12

**Bill Bowman (North East Scotland) (Con):** The SNP is seeking members' agreement to the proposed rates and bands for Scottish income tax. The Scottish Conservatives believe that it is unfair to burden hard-working Scots with more taxes or to widen the tax gap between Scotland and the rest of Britain, as the SNP has done in previous years.

Willie Rennie mentioned trust. I will repeat Murdo Fraser's point. The 2016 SNP manifesto said:

"We will freeze the Basic Rate of Income Tax throughout the next Parliament to protect those on low and middle incomes."

The SNP Government broke a manifesto promise and raised taxes for more than a million Scots. The transition point at which Scots begin to pay more tax than they would if they lived in the rest of the UK is £27,393, which would have come under the UK Government's basic rate.

Nicola Sturgeon said in the Parliament:

"I have been very clear that the Government will not increase income tax rates."—[*Official Report*, 2 February 2017; c 10.]

The Government was elected on a manifesto promise not to increase income tax rates, but it broke that promise.

In 2016, almost two thirds of Scots—64.6 per cent—voted in the Scottish Parliament election for parties that promised not to raise taxes. The Deputy First Minister declared:

"I want to say to teachers and public service workers the length and breadth of the country ... that the last thing that I am going to do is put up their taxes."—[*Official Report*, 3 February 2016; c 19-20.]

The former Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Constitution—remember him?—said:

"A Government's first point of reference is surely the manifesto on which it was elected ... our first position is to look at the manifesto."—[*Official Report, Finance and Constitution Committee*, 11 January 2017; c 40.]

**Tom Arthur (Renfrewshire South) (SNP):** Will the member give way on that point?

**Bill Bowman:** On which point?

**Tom Arthur:** That was a very good riposte.

Can Mr Bowman confirm that it is still Conservative Party policy that there should be parity between the income tax rates in Scotland and those in the rest of the UK? Will he confirm whether he intends to run on that manifesto in the coming election?

**Bill Bowman:** I will not, because I am not running in the election. I think that Murdo Fraser said that our aim is that we should reach a parity position at least in due course. [*Interruption.*] May I continue?

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** Mr Bowman, through me, please.

**Bill Bowman:** Thank you, Presiding Officer.

We say to the Scottish people that there is at least one party in this chamber that is on their side, that does not want to see the income tax gap between Scotland and the rest of the UK grow and that opposes that happening: the Scottish Conservatives.

The saddest aspect of all this is that the attack on Scottish income tax is being exacted willingly. Inflicting economic hardship on Scottish workers and risking the Scottish economy is a political choice by the SNP. Although the SNP might be content to view hard-working Scots as a golden goose, the Scottish Conservatives stand up for public services, for hard-pressed Scots and families and for fair taxation, and in support of Scotland's economy.

Our armed forces have never been more visible in Scotland during peacetime, and they have given our vaccine and testing regime a real shot in the arm. I think that we all appreciate their contributions. However, in return, members of the forces in Scotland will continue to be taxed more than their colleagues in England.

**Kate Forbes:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Bill Bowman:** I will finish this point first. The armed forces tax tab will continue to be picked up by the UK Government. Will the cabinet secretary fix that major error by her predecessor and restore fairness to the armed forces? I am particularly concerned about the issue because the Royal

Marines are located at the fantastic RM Condor base in Arbroath in my region of North East Scotland.

**Kate Forbes:** Is the member pushing his UK Government to ensure that lower-paid armed forces personnel in England get taxed less, so that there is parity with the armed forces in Scotland?

**Bill Bowman:** Perhaps I should have listened more carefully, but are we discussing the situation in Scotland or the rest of the UK?

**Kate Forbes:** Lower-paid taxpayers in Scotland pay less tax, and the equivalent applies to the armed forces. My question is whether the member is pressing the UK Government to ensure that those in the armed forces who earn less pay less tax.

**Bill Bowman:** I think that those are apples and pears, and the cabinet secretary is trying to get away from the issue. She does not recognise an unfairness unless it is pointed out to her. I am pointing one out to her—in Scotland.

Although we welcome the SNP's decision to listen to the Scottish Conservatives and freeze income tax this year, that does not change the fact that, in its budget, the SNP chooses to prioritise another independence referendum. The Scottish Conservatives have managed to stop the SNP hiking taxes this year, but the cabinet secretary referred to her Government being a minority Government and if the SNP has a majority, there will be nothing to stop taxes skyrocketing to pay for its political priorities.

The SNP has promised and failed to deliver on local tax reform for more than a decade. We might have a different finance secretary now, but the same problems exist. It is time that the SNP is held to account—and it will be. The only way to stop the SNP and get the Scottish Parliament 100 per cent focused on rebuilding Scotland from this crisis is to vote for the Scottish Conservatives today and in May.

17:18

**Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP):** I welcome the debate and the Scottish Government's proposals on the rate resolution for the next financial year. Most people understand the challenges that we face and will continue to go through. Certainty and stability in the approach to reopening the economy and society are absolutely vital, bearing in mind the instability that we are going to face over the coming 12 months. Moreover, some of the questions that were raised at the COVID-19 Committee this morning centred on dealing with Covid next winter, never mind the coming months. That is indicative of the

challenges that we all will face as a country and a society in the next year.

The Scottish Government's income tax policy proposals maintain its commitment to a fairer and more progressive tax system that protects lower and middle-income taxpayers while raising additional revenue to invest in public services and Scotland's economy. At a time when people across our country are dealing with the economic and social impacts that the pandemic has brought us, the policy that we are discussing delivers a certainty and a stability that our constituents need from the tax system.

Even with the challenges ahead, income tax is forecast to raise an additional £475 million for the 2021-22 Scottish budget. That is money that every single MSP in the next session of Parliament will welcome and which every current MSP should welcome, because it will be reinvested in our public services and the economy as part of the Covid recovery.

The next 12 months will be the most challenging that we have ever faced, and it is crucial that we continue to support households and families during that time. That is why the Scottish Government will ensure that no Scottish taxpayer will pay more income tax in 2021-22 than they pay now on their current income. Further, for a fourth consecutive year, more than half of Scottish income tax payers—54 per cent—will pay less tax than they would if they lived anywhere else in the UK.

It is therefore vital that we do not delay taking important decisions on income tax. The much delayed UK budget has already had an impact on the setting of the Scottish Government's budget, as the finance secretary discussed in the budget debate and as has been highlighted in this debate, too. The people of Scotland are looking for some certainty over the next 12 months.

I listened to Jackie Baillie's comments about fair pay in the budget debate and wondered what she did when she was a minister in the Scottish Executive, when Labour councils throughout Scotland were paying women a lot less than male colleagues for doing jobs that were similar or the same. The issue of equal pay existed for decades, but the Labour Party did not do anything about it. Clearly, equal pay and treating female workers fairly were not priorities for the Labour Party then.

In September 2020, the Scottish Government published a consultation on devolved tax policy choices for the 2021-22 budget and the fiscal framework, in line with its commitment to engage on tax policy. Such policy is fundamental to any country's ability to support its economy and rebuild after a period of crisis—and we know that,

because of Covid, we will have to do a lot of rebuilding.

The time is right to consider the devolution of additional tax powers to Scotland. However, those of us of an SNP persuasion, as well as the Greens, ask why we should limit ourselves in that way. I believe that it is vital that the powers of independence come to the Scottish Parliament if we are to deliver the country that we should all want to see for the people of Scotland.

17:22

**Shona Robison (Dundee City East) (SNP):** I welcome the motion, which I believe delivers on the Government's commitment to a fairer and more progressive tax system that will continue to protect lower and middle-income taxpayers while raising additional revenue for essential public services and the economy. I also welcome the announcement that, in order to deliver certainty for taxpayers and stability for revenues, there will be no changes to income tax rates this year.

As we recover from the pandemic, it is important that households and families are supported at a difficult time. Today's rates resolution will ensure that no Scottish taxpayer will pay more income tax in 2021-22 than they do now on their current income. That will be welcome news to households across Scotland who have been struggling with the effects of Covid-19 on their incomes. Recent analysis from the office of the chief economist of the distributional impact of the Government's income tax policy choices over this parliamentary session has shown that the Scottish Government's decisions have been redistributive and have protected low-income taxpayers. Overall, 77 per cent of Scottish income tax payers will pay less tax in 2021-22; taxpayers in the middle of the income distribution will pay £135 less in tax in 2021-22; and the lowest-earning 20 per cent of income tax payers will see the largest decrease in tax, while the highest earning 10 per cent of taxpayers will see the largest increase in tax, which is how it should be.

On the 2021-22 budget, the rates that have been set out today are forecast to raise an additional £475 million in revenue. We can use that money to support our health service and invest in a greener and fairer economy as part of our recovery from Covid-19.

Of course, we are making tax policy decisions in an incredibly challenging economic, health and social landscape, with unprecedented uncertainty, particularly due to the impacts of Covid-19 and European Union exit. The challenge is made only harder by the delay to the UK budget, which means that we will not know what the full suite of UK tax, fiscal and economic policies will be before

we make our policy decisions. That is very challenging indeed. However, the Scottish Government has tried to be as open as possible about our policies in order to provide certainty and stability, and I urge the UK Government to do the same.

The Scottish Government's approach to setting policy is to be commended and should serve as a good example—certainly, the UK Government could learn from it. In September, the Scottish Government published a consultation on its tax policy and sought the views of individuals and organisations on their tax priorities and the challenges for the future. That initiative is hugely important, and we need to build on it if we are to effectively reflect and incorporate the hopes and aspirations of the people of Scotland in our planning for what a future Scotland should look like. I look forward to learning more about how we can ensure that their voice is at the centre of our policy decision-making process.

I welcome today's announcements, which build on our commitment to a fairer and more progressive tax system in very difficult times. The approach provides certainty and stability for taxpayers, and I look forward to hearing how the Scottish Government plans to strengthen the contribution that individuals and organisations can make on its taxation priorities.

17:26

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** In recent weeks, we have had several debates in the chamber about the economic priorities that will be required when Scotland emerges from the pandemic. Although there are undoubtedly different policy priorities across the political parties, as we have seen this afternoon, there is a genuine desire for the main focus to be on people's jobs, investment and economic growth.

Crucial to that is the question of tax, as almost every economic briefing to members by the business community has highlighted. Businesses are naturally desperate for increased consumer spending as soon as possible, to boost the Scottish economy. It is therefore good news that the Scottish National Party has, for once, listened to the Scottish Conservatives and frozen income tax this year—although, as Murdo Fraser rightly said, it is to be hoped that this time, unlike with the pledges that the SNP made in 2016, it keeps its promises. To raise taxes at any time does not sit easily with the Scottish Conservatives, but that is especially the case now, when so many families and businesses are so hard up. We therefore welcome the SNP's announcement that there is to be an income tax freeze for 2021-22.

Mr McKee read out comments from the business community. He is right that, in the circumstances, with jobs being lost all the time, a further move to hit take-home pay would be serious and would jeopardise economic recovery. Of course, the recent evidence is that raising taxes has not worked in drawing in sufficient additional revenue. We all know what happens in circumstances when the resulting borrowing has to increase: we end up saddled with more debt. If that happens at the same time as increasing unemployment and reduced employment, that clearly diminishes the tax base and is not a good thing.

I will turn to a few of the themes that I spoke about when the Parliament debated the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee's report on the green recovery, just a few weeks ago. That was a good debate in that it flushed out where each party thinks the main economic impetus should be. For me, there were two aspects to that. First, stakeholders are asking the Parliament to undertake careful consideration of where Government—at Westminster and at Holyrood—should invest public money to deliver best value and what incentives are needed to stimulate sectors to invest in key infrastructure projects, because that investment will be absolutely crucial for jobs.

Just about every witness from whom we have heard at the ECCLR Committee in recent months has pushed for accelerated investment in infrastructure and greater commitment to that in the Scottish budget. In that respect, effective procurement is essential, and the committee's report clearly identifies that as being critical when it comes to aligning funding with infrastructure development and capital investment. The role of the new Scottish National Investment Bank is welcome, but it can succeed only if there is willing co-operation between the private, public and, indeed, third sectors, with full focus on delivering best value for money on a regional basis as well as on a national basis.

Time is short in this debate, so I will conclude my remarks by addressing the importance of tax policy in creating the necessary incentives to ensure that there is a boost in consumer spending and an increase in optimism for the business sector, which, in many ways, has been bearing the brunt of the Covid-19 pandemic, and in ensuring that Scotland is an attractive place in which to invest.

These are not easy times, but we have a collective responsibility to ensure that we are giving Scotland every chance to recover.

17:30

**Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP):** It is a while since I have been in the Parliament in person and I was not sure how positive and constructive today's debate would be. However, on the whole, it has been positive—I am talking not only about the speeches from the Government members but about those from the Liberal Democrat and Green members, too. That was good to see.

I am pleased to speak in this short debate on the Scottish rate resolution. If agreed today, the rates and bands will come into effect from 6 April this year. I note that the rates come with a forecast that they will raise an additional £475 million for the 2021-22 Scottish budget, which is welcome and needed. On those assumptions, the majority—54 per cent—of Scottish taxpayers will pay slightly less income tax in 2021-22 than they would if they lived elsewhere in the UK. It is not a competition, but that gives a relative perspective on the priorities of income tax in Scotland versus the rest of the UK. That 54 per cent represents the taxpayers who pay the lower and basic rates. The tax policy, therefore, seeks to protect those on the lowest incomes, and I very much welcome that. Of course, the Scottish income tax bands are progressive and, therefore, those in the higher income brackets will pay a bit more—that is self-evident.

It is important during the current Covid-19 pandemic to have as much certainty and stability as possible in our tax system, and the rate resolution provides that—that was acknowledged by members across the parties, which was good to see. However, there will clearly be a need to continue to engage with the wider public and stakeholders with regard to how our tax system can fund the delivery of the healthier, wealthier, fairer and greener Scotland that we all want. At some point, we will have to go further than we are going this afternoon.

That will mean not just having a frank and open discussion about how we might use our current income tax flexibilities differently but thinking about what further devolution to this place of tax and fiscal levers might be needed to achieve those ambitions. The issue is not necessarily just about increasing taxes to fund the country that we want to become; it is also about this place broadening the tax base. That is important.

I very much hope that we can get to a position in Scotland's Parliament where we agree that the money that we raise in taxes is an investment in the kind of society that we wish to see and is not weaponised by political parties as a way of scoring party-political points—some parties do that more than others, but all parties do it at times. In that respect, perhaps the Conservatives should reflect

on their contributions this afternoon. I appreciate that taking that approach is particularly challenging in the run-up to an election, so it may be that the parties will have to wait until after May before they can come together to make progress on that issue. However, I think that the vast majority of people in this Parliament are moving in the same direction.

That said, I welcome the Scottish Government's consultation on devolved taxes as a genuine attempt to promote that debate in a positive and constructive fashion. When we look at the taxes that we pay as a nation, we should also look at the assistance and services that we secure for society. That is important, as tax is gathered from individuals but the benefit is accrued by society. That is the social contract that I hope that everyone in the chamber signs up to, whether it involves supporting carers with a carers allowance settlement, which gives unpaid carers a 19 per cent increase in their financial support; Scotland's new game-changing Scottish child payment, which gives the lowest-income households £40 every four weeks; increasing the eligibility to free school meals and looking to move to universal provision of free school meals all year round for primary school children; the NHS, which is remarkable, despite the clear challenges that it is under; or the investment in our schools through the attainment fund, which will come to £750 million over the course of this parliamentary session, and the pupil equity fund, which will see schools in my constituency in the coming financial year get an additional £3.3 million to further boost attainment, which is something that I greatly welcome.

There might be different political choices in this place about how we spend the money that is raised. I get that, but that is only one side of the equation, and I hope that we get consensus this afternoon on the fact that the tax that we pay is for the benefit of all of society. With that in mind, I will be supporting this afternoon's rate resolution.

17:34

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate on the Scottish Government's rate resolution settlement for 2021-22. Last time I spoke in an equivalent debate, I was a member of the Finance and Constitution Committee. Many members this afternoon have spoken about and recognised the work of Bruce Crawford, and I, too, recognise his able way as an MSP, a convener and a parliamentarian.

I am pleased to speak about how the rate resolution proposals will directly benefit people across Dumfries and Galloway and the rest of Scotland. The Scottish Government's income tax policy proposals for the upcoming financial year

maintain our commitment to a fairer and more progressive tax system, protecting lower and middle-income taxpayers while raising additional revenue to invest in public services, Scotland's economy and the Covid-19 recovery. It is worth repeating what Stuart McMillan and Bob Doris have said: in 2021-22, the majority of Scottish taxpayers—54 per cent of them—will pay less tax than they would if they lived elsewhere in the UK which, given the financial hardship caused by the pandemic, is extremely welcome.

To that end, and to deliver stability and certainty from the tax system for people in Scotland, there will be no non-inflation changes to Scottish income tax rates this year. That includes increasing the starter band, the basic band and the higher rate of income tax by the rate of inflation only, with a freeze of the income tax top-rate threshold in cash terms at £150,000. That will allow people and families across Scotland room to support economic recovery from the pandemic.

This is an incredibly challenging economic, health and social landscape within which to make tax policy decisions, with unprecedented uncertainty, in particular due to the impact of Covid-19 and exit from the European Union. The state of the current landscape is exacerbated by the delay to the UK budget, which means that we do not know what the full suite of UK tax, fiscal and economic policies will be before we make our own Scottish policy decisions.

The Scottish Government's focus is now on delivering tax policies that will help and support Scotland's economy to recover in 2021-22 and beyond, recognising the role that tax can play in supporting the individuals and businesses most affected. The tax package that has been set out by the Scottish Government in response to those challenges supports the economy and underlines its recognition of and commitment to tackling the inequalities that have been further exposed by Covid-19.

I welcome the Government's announcement that the revenues that are raised from taxation will support the most comprehensive range of free-to-access public services in the UK, in addition to the on-going Covid-19 support. That package is part of a budget that invests in Scotland's recovery, supporting the individuals and businesses most affected. I again appeal to the cabinet secretary to ensure that no Dumfries and Galloway business, or indeed any Scottish business, is missed or is left to fall through any cracks.

The Scottish Government has been clear that this is not the time for sweeping reforms of the tax system or fiscal consolidation. Indeed, leading fiscal commentators, including the OECD, agree that now is not the time to balance the books, and that the time for any tax rises is when the recovery

is firmly under way. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has said that tax rises should not be implemented any time soon and that substantial tax rises should not be part of the coming UK budget. I agree that it is a time for stability and certainty, with targeted support for the individuals and businesses that have been most impacted by Covid-19.

The Scottish Government's focus is rightly on delivering tax policies that will support Scotland's people and the economic recovery this year and beyond, which I welcome.

The rate resolution settlement, combined with the budget, will support the response to Covid-19 and will support people and families across Scotland. I call on the UK Government to act similarly.

**The Presiding Officer:** We come to the closing speeches.

17:39

**James Kelly (Glasgow) (Lab):** I am pleased to close this important debate on the Scottish income tax rate resolution. As Murdo Fraser said, this year's debate comes at an unusual time in proceedings—before stage 2 and before publication of the UK budget. Scottish Labour understands that certainty around tax rates is needed and we will not oppose the rate resolution tonight. However, the way in which taxes are set has a direct link to the budget and important issues need to be flushed out and debated, not only this afternoon, but in the future, as we consider how to recover from the pandemic.

The tax rates that the SNP has set out do not match up to its rhetoric since Scotland was granted tax-raising powers. We have heard much this afternoon from SNP members, including Ivan McKee, about how progressive the system is, but the reality is that the bands are far too wide. Take the range from the higher rate threshold to the top rate threshold: it runs from £43,662 to £150,000, which means that a senior nurse pays the same rate of tax as a chief executive officer in a top company. That cannot be fair. Also, the top-rate threshold has been frozen, which in effect gives an inflationary tax cut to 18,000 taxpayers in that band. As Ivan McKee ran through the consultation that he was expounding greatly about, I wondered whether anybody had told him that those bands represent fairness in the tax system, because I do not believe that they do.

As Jackie Baillie pointed out, the effects of the pandemic sadly mean that people on the lower rates will suffer more disruption to their lives—potentially losing jobs and working fewer hours—and will therefore be in more difficult circumstances than people who pay the top rates, who in many cases are protected. All of that

matters, because how much tax is raised directly affects what can be done in the budget. The Government's lacklustre ambition in relation to tax means that we see an impact on the budget. It cannot be right, as was reflected in the previous debate, that there is a sad increase in the number of homeless people who are dying, but there are cuts in the homelessness budget. I know that more money has been introduced, but less money is available for housing in the budget, which is unacceptable. In addition, if we want to achieve the ambition of rewarding care workers fairly and paying them £15 an hour, we need a tax system that matches the revenue raised with what is needed to deliver that.

Another thing to reflect on in relation to the forecast is that the pandemic will have a major impact, as the Scottish Fiscal Commission has noted. It could be that employment levels will be affected during the rest of this year, particularly when the furlough scheme comes to an end, which could significantly reduce tax revenues—one of the forecasts indicates that revenues could be £500 million less—and impact on future Scottish budgets.

We need an understanding of the issues that we face as we come out of the pandemic—an understanding of the reality that not only people's lives but their jobs and incomes will be disrupted. We therefore need to look at a fair tax system to fund the budget properly, and we need to make demands to set a budget that helps recovery from the pandemic, properly supports the NHS to deal with the backlog that will exist, and supports our pupils and students in the school system, many of whom have been disenfranchised during this school year.

17:44

**Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con):** There are usually two certainties with a Scottish budget—taxes going up and a pantomime from the Greens, pretending that they might not support it. I am pleased to say that at least one of those traditions has been broken this year, with income tax rates being frozen at long last.

I welcome the rate freeze, and the fact that ministers have listened to the Scottish Conservatives on the matter. As Bill Bowman highlighted, it is unfair to burden hard-working Scots with more taxes. For the Government to take more of people's hard-earned wage packets right now would only pile more pressure on families who are already struggling. With businesses on their knees, jobs being lost and families facing tough times, every penny that they can keep in their pocket makes things a little bit easier.

We know that the public does not want tax hikes. At the previous Scottish Parliament election in 2016, almost two thirds of voters backed parties that were promising no tax rises. As Liz Smith highlighted, the Scottish Conservatives keep their promises. Ivan McKee said that he wants taxes that deliver for Scotland. I agree with that, and I agreed with him and the SNP in 2016. Sadly, the SNP went on to break its manifesto promise not to raise taxes, and instead raised the taxes of more than a million Scots, making Scotland the highest-taxed part of the UK. Even people on moderate salaries of just over £27,000 were paying more than they would elsewhere in the UK.

Murdo Fraser highlighted that broken promise, as well as the broken SNP promise to raise the personal allowance to £12,750. That makes it clear that we cannot trust the SNP on tax. In fact, the previous finance secretary did not even understand basic economics.

The fundamental problem with the strategy of hiking taxes has been that it has not actually worked. Income tax revenue has been lower than expected, and reconciliations from the 2018-19 budget have blown a £300 million hole in the budget. That will have to be filled by borrowing £309 million, thereby saddling the taxpayer with more debt. That debt is already costing £66 million in repayments this year alone.

If the high-tax strategy has not worked so far, the pandemic makes it even less likely that it will work in the future. Currently, 123,000 Scots are out of work, and new figures released this week show that the employment rate is dipping. Therefore, the tax base is being eroded.

The situation would be far worse had it not been for the massive support package that was deployed by the Conservative British Government. Its furlough scheme has protected almost a million Scottish jobs. If those jobs had been lost, the effect on the economy would have been catastrophic. As it is, the British Government has now spent a staggering £20 billion to support Scotland through the pandemic, more than £12 billion of which has been used to increase the Scottish budget into 2022.

However, although we now see some hope from the incredible success of the UK's vaccination programme, the economic effects of the pandemic will be with us for years to come. The Scottish Fiscal Commission is forecasting that it will be at least 2024 before the economy returns to pre-pandemic levels. Therefore, jobs must continue to be an economic priority, and the SNP should focus on protecting existing jobs and creating new ones to expand the tax base and grow the economy. However, that was not happening before the pandemic. Scotland already had the slowest rate of business growth and job creation in the UK. In

fact, the slower rate of job creation means that the SNP has, in effect, cost Scotland more than 260,000 jobs since it came to power in 2007.

Now that we are looking to recovery efforts, it is important that those failings are not repeated. By now, we should have seen a concrete plan for a green recovery, with the budget putting in place the funding for it. Instead, the SNP has cut funding for the very things that would help to create new well-paid jobs and expand the economy more sustainably. For example, the rail infrastructure budget has been cut by £33 million, and the newly launched Scottish National Investment Bank's budget is already down by £36 million. Perhaps most worrying is the £66 million cut to the innovation and industry budget.

Those cuts come on top of the underfunding of Scottish universities—the institutions that should be driving innovation, research and attracting new investment. They requested £206 million to make the sector financially viable. The SNP provided just £6 million.

Those are the wrong choices for funding a green recovery, building more resilient services and creating better jobs. Therefore, just as the Scottish Conservatives have already put a stop to tax hikes this year, we will keep pushing the SNP to make the right choices.

17:50

**Ivan McKee:** I thank members for their contributions and, in a moment, I will reflect on the points that have been raised during the debate. Before I do that, I remind members that, just a few hours ago, we debated the Budget (Scotland) (No 5) (Bill) at stage 1 and I now ask members to vote for the rate resolution. The Scottish Government is not willing to delay important decisions about income tax to allow for the UK Government's inability to produce its budget. It is hugely disappointing that, once again, the Scottish budget is being debated and delivered without the assumptions of the UK budget to underpin it. This year is another in which we have had to base our judgments on outdated forecasts and partial information.

I want to pick up on some of members' contributions. First up, I reflect on Murdo Fraser's contribution. I welcome his agreement to our tax policy. As the cabinet secretary said earlier, we have reduced the tax rate for the majority of taxpayers in Scotland, which makes Scotland the lowest-taxed part of the UK. I want to come back to that.

**Murdo Fraser:** Will the minister apologise for his party's two broken promises on tax?

**Ivan McKee:** I will not apologise for the fact that the majority of taxpayers in Scotland now pay less tax than those in the rest of the UK. That is what talks to the progressive policy that the Scottish Government has implemented.

The fiscal framework does not, as Murdo Fraser said, protect tax revenue. It allows for the Scottish Government, through the tax policies that we implement, to generate additional revenue, provided that the Scottish tax base performs at least as well as the one in the rest of the UK. Through the tax and other economic policies that the Government has adopted, that has indeed been the case. Not only have the tax policies in Scotland performed better than those across the rest of the UK over the lifetime of this session of Parliament, but they will deliver an additional £930 million to be spent in Scotland as a consequence of that superior performance.

I am glad that Willie Rennie recognises that this is a time for stability. That is at the core of the Scottish budget. I agree with him that the Conservatives are confused about that. He observed that we will have a more mature consideration in this Parliament due to our having more powers on tax and spend. I will go further—and I am sure that Willie Rennie, being the perceptive individual that he is, will also make this link: the more powers that the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government have, the more mature will be our consideration of those issues. Consequently, I am sure that he would support the further devolution of tax powers; perhaps, going the whole way, he might also want to consider in due course supporting the devolution of all powers to the Parliament—our independence.

Willie Rennie made an interesting point about the impact of tax measures and behavioural changes. He will be aware of the Scottish Fiscal Commission's work on modelling those tax and income elasticities, the range of measures that it uses for that, and the work that is being done in order to understand them.

As the member rightly pointed out, the effect of all our tax policies has been that we have not seen significant behavioural change at the top end of the tax rate. We have judged it very effectively and we have positioned those tax increases at the point on the Laffer curve, to refer to one of Mr Fraser's favourite things, at which we have been able to leverage additional—

**Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** How is it coming on?

**The Presiding Officer:** Order.

**Ivan McKee:** If members are quiet and let me continue, I will explain it. *[Laughter.]* We have been able to leverage additional revenue from those tax increases without reaching the point at

which it becomes counter-productive. HMRC's modelling on the TIE—the tax income elasticity—comes in at 0.48 and the SFC has a range from 0.1 up to around 0.7 at the top end.

I will comment on the Laffer curve, because it is a shame that we did not again get the opportunity to listen to Mr Fraser pretending that he understands the Laffer curve. *[Laughter.]* Where the Laffer curve says—*[Interruption.]* If the member listens, he might learn something. The Laffer curve indeed says that not all increases in tax rates result in an increase in tax revenue, but it does not say that all increases in tax rates result in a reduction in tax revenue, nor does it argue that all decreases in tax rates result in an increase in tax revenue. *[Interruption.]* I think that the member did; he should go back and listen to what he said. That is why, Mr Fraser, it is a curve not a straight line. It is important to understand where the point of inflection is and that is done by looking at the tax income elasticities. If the member had listened to what I said, he might have learned something.

I move on to Patrick Harvie's comments. I agree that the role of tax needs to be looked at, but he also got a bit confused about where he was going with that; I am not sure exactly what his message is on the matter. He said that the Scottish tax system delivers for the majority of taxpayers a lower tax rate than they would have in the rest of the UK. Is he saying that that is not a good thing? Will the Green Party manifesto argue for tax increases for lower-paid members of our communities? I am sure that that is not what he means, but what came across was quite confused, as were his comments on green ports. Is Patrick Harvie saying that we should not be arguing for enforcing payment of the real living wage, stopping zero-hour contracts, taking steps to tackle the gender pay gap and accelerating the net zero transition? That is what will happen in those green ports.

When Mark Ruskell came to the session that I ran, he listened to what was said and was fairly supportive of the comments that we made and could find no points to argue against. However, he clearly went back to his boss and was given a line, which is that the Greens have an ideological opposition to generating economic activity, which is of course what pays for our public services.

**Willie Rennie:** Can the minister enlighten the chamber on whether this is the end of the love-in between the Greens and the SNP?

**Murdo Fraser:** It is between the Liberal Democrats and the SNP. Willie Rennie is the new Patrick Harvie.

**Ivan McKee:** I could not possibly comment. That is above my pay grade.

In my last couple of minutes, I will mention some other contributions. Bill Bowman talked about various gaps, but at one point there was quite a large gap in his narrative as he wandered through his contribution. To pick up on his specific point on the armed forces and the intervention from the cabinet secretary, it is important to recognise that although the Conservatives talk about higher-paid members of the armed forces and the differential in tax, the lower-paid ranks in the services benefit from a lower rate of tax in Scotland than they would pay across the rest of the UK. The cabinet secretary's point was that the Conservatives should argue for that benefit for privates and others across the armed forces who work in England, so that they could benefit from the UK Government intervening to give them the lower tax rate that they would have enjoyed had they been stationed in Scotland.

Several members reflected on the importance of stability and certainty and that is at the core of what we are offering in the budget. I mention Shona Robison, Bob Doris and others in that regard.

James Kelly should reflect on the fact that the progressive nature of the budget that the Scottish Government has delivered and continues to deliver means that the majority of taxpayers in Scotland will pay less tax than they would in the rest of the UK, and that through the measures that we have taken, as I have said, the additional revenues generated—£930 million above the block grant adjustment—will be available to be spent on public services in Scotland beyond what would otherwise have been the case.

Liz Smith is another Conservative who complimented our approach and referenced the significant business support for what we have delivered. Her point on procurement was important and well made. I have responsibility for that area and we are working hard to see what additional steps we can take to leverage public sector procurement to support the growth of Scottish business.

The decisions that we make on tax are often passionately debated across the chamber and in homes across the country, which reflects the fact that income tax affects everyone, whether that is through the tax that we pay on our salaries or in its role in funding the public services that we all rely on in our daily lives.

There will be a time in the future when we are once again asked to debate changes to the tax system, but that time is not now. The proposals that are in front of us today reflect the income tax system that Scotland needs now. They protect household budgets and maintain spending power in real terms, they preserve our progressive tax system—which continues to protect low-income

earners—and they provide the certainty and stability that people need from the tax system. Therefore, I invite members to support the proposals in the rate resolution.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes our debate on the Scottish income tax rate resolution. Standing order rule 11.3.1 requires the question on the Scottish income tax rate resolution to be put immediately after the debate.

The question is, that motion S5M-24225, in the name of Kate Forbes, on the Scottish income tax rate resolution, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division. I suspend the meeting for a few moments to allow members to access the voting app.

18:01

*Meeting suspended.*

18:05

*On resuming—*

**The Presiding Officer:** We move straight to the vote on motion S5M-24225, in the name of Kate Forbes, on the Scottish income tax rate resolution. Members should cast their votes now. This will be a one-minute division.

The vote is now closed. Members should let me know if they were unable to vote.

**For**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and  
 Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse)  
 (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (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)  
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Ind)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

#### Against

Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)

#### Abstentions

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Reform)  
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 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)  
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)  
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire)  
 (Con)  
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)  
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on motion S5M-24225, in the name of Kate Forbes, on the Scottish income tax rate resolution, is: For 88, Against 1, Abstentions 35.

#### *Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that, for the purposes of section 11A of the Income Tax Act 2007 (which provides for income tax to be charged at Scottish rates on certain non-savings and non-dividend income of a Scottish taxpayer), the Scottish rates and limits for the tax year 2021-22 are as follows—

- (a) a starter rate of 19%, charged on income up to a limit of £2,097,
- (b) the Scottish basic rate is 20%, charged on income above £2,097 and up to a limit of £12,726,
- (c) an intermediate rate of 21%, charged on income above £12,726 and up to a limit of £31,092,
- (d) a higher rate of 41%, charged on income above £31,092 and up to a limit of £150,000, and
- (e) a top rate of 46%, charged on income above £150,000.

## Scottish Fiscal Commission Appointment

18:07

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** The next item of business is consideration of motion S5M-24223, in the name of Kate Forbes, on an appointment to the Scottish Fiscal Commission.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees with the recommendation of the Scottish Government and the Finance and Constitution Committee that Professor Alasdair Smith be reappointed to the Scottish Fiscal Commission.—[*Kate Forbes*]

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

## Parliamentary Bureau Motion

18:08

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** The next item is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S5M-24236, on a stage 2 extension and suspension of standing orders.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that—

(a) consideration of the Tied Pubs (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 be completed by 5 March 2021;

(b) under Rule 12.3.3B of Standing Orders, the Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee can meet, if necessary, at the same time as a meeting of the Parliament, during Members' Business on Tuesday 2 March 2021, for the purpose of considering the Tied Pubs (Scotland) Bill at stage 2;

(c) for the purposes of consideration of the Tied Pubs (Scotland) Bill at stage 2, the second sentence of Rule 9.10.2 of Standing Orders is suspended.—[*Graeme Dey*]

**The Presiding Officer:** The question on the motion will be put at decision time, to which we now come.

## Decision Time

18:08

**The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh):** The first question is, that amendment S5M-24224.1, in the name of Murdo Fraser, which seeks to amend motion S5M-24224, in the name of Kate Forbes, on the Budget (Scotland) (No 5) Bill, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division. Members may cast their votes now. This is a one-minute division.

The vote is now closed. Please let me know if you were not able to vote.

**Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I was unable to vote. I would have voted yes.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Cameron. I will make sure that your vote is added to the voting roll.

### For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumarton) (Lab)  
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)  
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)  
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

### 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)  
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Reform)  
 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 Kinrossshire) (SNP)  
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (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)

#### Abstentions

Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Ind)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S5M-24224.1, in the name of Murdo Fraser, which seeks to amend motion S5M-24224, in the name of Kate Forbes, on the Budget (Scotland) (No 5) Bill, is: For 53, Against 62, Abstentions 10.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S5M-24224.2, in the name of Jackie Baillie, which seeks to amend motion S5M-24224, in the name of Kate Forbes, on the Budget (Scotland) (No 5) Bill, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

#### For

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

#### 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)  
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Reform)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (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)

#### Abstentions

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)

Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)  
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)  
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Ind)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S5M-24224.2, in the name of Jackie Baillie, which seeks to amend motion S5M-24224, in the name of Kate Forbes, on the Budget (Scotland) (No 5) Bill, is: For 22, Against 60, Abstentions 41.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S5M-24224, in the name of Kate Forbes, on the Budget (Scotland) (No 5) Bill at stage 1, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

The vote is now closed. Members should let me know if they were unable to vote.

**For**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumarton) (Lab)  
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)

Cunningham, Roseanna (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Freeman, Jeane (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 Macdonald, Lewis (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Marra, Jenny (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (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)  
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Ind)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

#### Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Ballantyne, Michelle (South Scotland) (Reform)  
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Davidson, Ruth (Edinburgh Central) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)  
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)  
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

#### Abstentions

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

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on motion S5M-24224, in the name of Kate Forbes, on the Budget (Scotland) (No 5) Bill at stage 1 is: For 88, Against 31, Abstentions 5.

#### *Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Budget (Scotland) (No.5) Bill.

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S5M-24223, in the name of Kate Forbes, on an appointment to the Scottish Fiscal Commission, be agreed to.

#### *Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees with the recommendation of the Scottish Government and the Finance and Constitution Committee that Professor Alasdair Smith be reappointed to the Scottish Fiscal Commission.

**The Presiding Officer:** The final question is, that motion S5M-24236, in the name of Graeme

Dey, on a stage 2 extension and suspension of standing orders, be agreed to.

#### *Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that—

(a) consideration of the Tied Pubs (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 be completed by 5 March 2021;

(b) under Rule 12.3.3B of Standing Orders, the Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee can meet, if necessary, at the same time as a meeting of the Parliament, during Members' Business on Tuesday 2 March 2021, for the purpose of considering the Tied Pubs (Scotland) Bill at stage 2;

(c) for the purposes of consideration of the Tied Pubs (Scotland) Bill at stage 2, the second sentence of Rule 9.10.2 of Standing Orders is suspended.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes decision time.

*Meeting closed at 18:16.*

This is the final edition of the *Official Report* for this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

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