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CONTENTS

	Col.
PORTFOLIO QUESTION TIME	1
COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT	1
Local Government (Support)	1
Homelessness Report	2
Sectoral Funds (Ring Fencing).....	3
East Lothian Council (Meetings).....	5
Housing Adaptations	6
Affordable Homes (Target).....	7
SOCIAL SECURITY AND OLDER PEOPLE	9
Low-income Households	9
Low-income Families with Children (Covid-19)	10
Self-isolation Support Grant	11
Social Security Scotland (Cost).....	12
Scottish Child Payment	13
Loneliness and Isolation	15
Social Security Scotland (Client Survey).....	16
PRIMARY CARE	18
<i>Motion moved—[Lewis Macdonald].</i>	
Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab).....	18
The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman)	21
Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con)	23
Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab).....	25
Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP).....	26
Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)	28
David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)	29
David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab).....	31
Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con)	33
Jeane Freeman.....	35
Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP)	36
SCOTLAND'S RECOVERY	40
<i>Motion moved—[Monica Lennon].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Jamie Hepburn].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Maurice Golden].</i>	
Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab)	40
Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con)	48
Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green)	50
Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD).....	52
Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)	54
David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab).....	56
Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP).....	59
Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)	61
John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP).....	63
Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab).....	66
Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP).....	68
Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con).....	71
Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP).....	74
Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con)	77
Jamie Hepburn	79
Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab).....	81
STANDING ORDERS	85
<i>Motion moved—[Bill Kidd].</i>	
Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP).....	85
BUSINESS MOTION	87
<i>Motion moved—[Graeme Dey]—and agreed to.</i>	

PARLIAMENTARY BUREAU MOTIONS	90
<i>Motions moved—[Graeme Dey].</i>	
James Kelly (Glasgow) (Lab)	90
The Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans (Graeme Dey)	91
DECISION TIME	93
AUTISM AND LEARNING DISABILITIES	104
<i>Motion debated—[Alexander Burnett].</i>	
Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con).....	104
Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP)	107
Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con)	108
Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab)	110
Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind).....	112
Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab).....	113
The Minister for Mental Health (Clare Haughey).....	115

Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 3 March 2021

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

Portfolio Question Time

Communities and Local Government

Local Government (Support)

1. **James Kelly (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to address the needs of local government. (S5O-05065)

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government (Aileen Campbell): Maintaining a close constructive partnership with local government has always been a priority for the Government. That partnership approach enables us to meet the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities regularly and to respond positively to the needs of local authorities and their communities. For example, I recently undertook extensive engagement with local authorities on our levels approach in the strategic framework, which will continue; we are supporting the European Charter for Local Self-Government (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill, which is a long-held aspiration of COSLA; and the overall Covid-19 support package for councils is up to almost £1.8 billion over this year and next year.

James Kelly: I thank the cabinet secretary for that answer, but the needs of local government have not been helped by a decade of Scottish National Party cuts. Cumulatively, £937 million of cuts have piled agony on to local communities, which has resulted in councils having to cut services and has undermined their ability to protect jobs. That can be seen in South Lanarkshire Council's budget, which, as the cabinet secretary will be aware, has been cut by more than £5 million. When will the SNP start standing up for local communities and stop cutting local government budgets?

Aileen Campbell: We have continued to, and always will, treat councils fairly. I set out a range of ways in which we engage regularly and thoroughly with local government. The current settlement that is being decided on through the budget process means that local government will get £11.6 billion, which is a fair and affordable settlement. Day-to-day funding for revenue services will increase by £335.6 million, which is a 3.1 per cent increase on last year's settlement.

South Lanarkshire Council will receive a total funding package of £649.3 million to support local services, which includes an extra £15.5 million to support vital day-to-day services.

During the Government's tenure, we have managed to deliver fair and affordable settlements for local government, treat councils fairly and engage with them thoroughly despite being under a decade of Tory austerity. We will continue to engage positively with local government as the budget bill progresses through Parliament.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Has the Labour party approached the cabinet secretary to say from whence additional funding for local government should be sourced—perhaps from the national health service, justice or education budgets? If additional funding is to come through increased taxation, has Labour said who would pay and by how much taxes should be increased?

Aileen Campbell: My colleague the Cabinet Secretary for Finance has been liaising with all parties in the chamber to discuss their budget propositions and to listen to their priorities. Interestingly, I am not aware of any specific Labour proposals on where additional funding should be sourced. We will continue to hear about the budget developments in Westminster, and the finance secretary will continue the discussions with Opposition parties. However, as far as I am aware, despite the calls for more money, I have not heard any specific proposals from the Labour party.

Homelessness Report

2. **Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the final report of the homelessness prevention review group. (S5O-05066)

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning (Kevin Stewart): We commissioned that work in response to the homelessness and rough sleeping action group's recommendations for ending homelessness. We welcome the prevention review group's recommendations, and we are grateful for the commitment of Crisis and other partners in delivering the report. I express my thanks to people with lived experience of homelessness, because of the vital role that their lived experience had in shaping the recommendations.

Shifting the balance of services and response towards prevention is more important than ever, given the current public health and rapidly developing economic crises. We will give full and proper consideration to the recommendations and will publish our formal response later this year.

Patrick Harvie: The report includes many valuable contributions to the debate on how to prevent homelessness, and I hope that the Government will take its recommendations seriously. It would be good to know early on whether the Government intends—as has been recommended—to make permanent some of the emergency changes to the private rented sector that have been made as a result of coronavirus.

What additional measures does the minister believe are necessary to strengthen the position of tenants in the private rented sector as part of the drive to prevent homelessness?

Kevin Stewart: I completely and utterly agree with Mr Harvie that it is a valuable report. The Government will consider it and improve on our homelessness prevention legislation at the earliest opportunity. We made that clear at the outset, when we commissioned the report in 2019. The recommendations are thorough and we will need to work through them to get the right legislation in place.

We will look to see how we can implement some of the measures that have been put in place during the pandemic period in normal, day-to-day business. For example, I would like pre-action protocols for the private rented sector to continue. I am sure that none of us wants a situation in which we put people in cliff-edge situations at the end of the pandemic. We must do all that we can to prevent homelessness as we move forward.

It would be useful if the UK Government did a U-turn and continued with the universal credit payments that are being made at the moment, looked more closely at housing benefit and got rid of the benefit cap. Those actions would help prevent homelessness without doubt, and I hope that the UK Government will do them.

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Question 3 has been withdrawn.

Sectoral Funds (Ring Fencing)

4. Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had regarding changing the ring-fence criteria concerning the sectoral funds distributed by local authorities. (S5O-05068)

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government (Aileen Campbell): The Scottish ministers have listened carefully to local authorities and have taken steps to replace the number of Covid-related ring-fenced funding streams. For example, during the current financial year, councils will have complete autonomy to deploy as they see fit the additional Covid funding of £275 million that was announced on 16 February, the £120 million discretionary fund to support their local business community and the

general £259 million that has been confirmed for next year.

The Scottish Government will continue to work in partnership with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and local authorities to ensure that our communities receive the lifeline support and services that they expect and deserve.

Rhoda Grant: I wonder whether the cabinet secretary has listened to businesses, because I have raised the rigid criteria that are attached to those funds with the Scottish Government on a number of occasions. Many organisations find that they do not easily meet those criteria, and they will therefore miss the safety net that is available.

Some of those companies are paying off staff as I speak. At this late stage, will the cabinet secretary review that and hand a lifeline to companies that are folding? Those are companies that, with help, could survive and boost our economy post-Covid.

Aileen Campbell: My colleagues Kate Forbes and others, including Fiona Hyslop, have engaged regularly with local authorities and businesses about the support that should be in place to help businesses. Discretionary funding has been put in place to support the local business community and to ensure that there is autonomy for local authorities to support those businesses, which are critical to their local economies.

If the member has particular businesses that she wants to raise as an example of where the plethora of support packages do not fit businesses' needs, I am sure that my colleagues would be really interested to know, because we want to ensure that we do all that we can to support businesses. That is why we have adapted and changed the funding to meet the needs of businesses, which we engage with regularly.

Rhoda Grant: I clarify to the minister that the businesses pay harbour dues and canal dues. That is the same as paying business rates but, to date, they have not received a penny. They are folding, and they need the minister's assistance now.

Aileen Campbell: I made the offer—I think quite clearly—that, if the member has particular businesses whose plight she wants to raise, she should do so, so that we can work collectively to make sure that they get the support that they require. I think that that is a fair offer. The member has raised particular businesses with particular needs in a communities and local government question session, and I am offering to meet her or to find some ways and solutions to help to support those businesses.

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): This subject comes up fairly regularly at my Local

Government and Communities Committee. Will the minister outline what changes the SNP Government has made to previous ring-fenced funding streams to provide local authorities with greater flexibility in deciding how best to allocate their total resources to services?

Aileen Campbell: When the SNP came into government, we removed the vast majority of ring-fenced funding streams by removing ring fencing from the funding and adding it to the general revenue and capital grants. That reduced the total amount of ring-fenced funding by £1.8 billion. With the introduction of the pupil equity fund and the expansion of early learning and childcare, the total amount of ring-fenced funding for 2021-22 is less than 8 per cent of the total local government finance settlement.

We endeavour to continue to work with local government to ensure that it has the resources that it needs. I indicated to James Kelly just how much that means for them in terms of their day-to-day spend.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Since 2013-14, the amount of money given to Scotland's councils that has been ring fenced by the Scottish Government has increased by 6 per cent. That means that councils have no control over almost £800 million. Communities across Scotland have different priorities. When will the Scottish Government recognise that a one-size-fits-all approach is not working and provide the funding that is necessary to support local services and rebuild our communities?

Aileen Campbell: Forgive me, Presiding Officer, but I think that, when I was in the chamber last week, the Tories were precisely proposing a one-size-fits-all approach to local government.

I set out in my response to James Dornan that, when we came into government, we reduced ring fencing, and I set out what the level of ring fencing is within the current budget. I set out to James Kelly just how much we have increased the local authorities budget settlement by. That is going through the budget process as we speak, and I set out what it means in terms of day-to-day revenue increases for local authorities.

We will continue to work with local authorities to make sure that we continue a fair and affordable settlement for them that enables them to meet the priorities of the communities that they serve.

The Presiding Officer: Question 5 has been withdrawn.

East Lothian Council (Meetings)

6. Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government when it last met East Lothian Council and what was discussed. (S5O-05070)

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government (Aileen Campbell): Ministers and officials regularly meet representatives of all Scottish local authorities, including East Lothian Council. That engagement enables discussion on a wide range of issues as part of our shared commitment to work in partnership with local government to improve outcomes for the people of Scotland.

Iain Gray: Over the past 20 years, East Lothian has experienced the highest percentage increase in population in Scotland, with growth of three times the Scottish average. Over 10,000 new homes are being built in the county as a requirement of the Scottish Government's national plan. Such growth requires significant extra resources in order to meet the increased demand on local services, but East Lothian Council has not received such additional investment, leaving it with a gap of over £4 million in its revenue funding for 2021-22. Can the minister explain why East Lothian is not being given the fair funding that it needs to support local services?

Aileen Campbell: I set out earlier that we engage with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities regularly around financing, which is done through my colleague Kate Forbes, in particular. If there are to be any changes to the distribution settlement, that has to come through COSLA. The Scottish Government has always maintained the position that, if there is to be—and if there is a desire for—a change to the distribution settlement, we would be open to discussions on that. However, that has to come through COSLA, so I advise Iain Gray to direct his local authority to engage in such discussions with COSLA.

Housing Adaptations

7. Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what recent discussions it has had with local authorities about housing adaptations. (S5O-05071)

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning (Kevin Stewart): Health and social care partnerships are responsible for the planning and funding of housing adaptations, so the Scottish Government has had no direct, specific discussions with local authorities about adaptations. We have committed to reviewing the current housing adaptations system and we are engaging with all those who are involved in the adaptations process, including local authorities. We want to ensure that we improve and streamline the system and maximise the impact of investment while meeting the needs of people.

Annabelle Ewing: It is good to hear of the ongoing review. However, in the current climate of the coronavirus pandemic, can the minister clarify whether housing adaptations should, in fact, be

considered as essential works for the purposes of the coronavirus legislation that is in place? Will the minister undertake to impress on local authorities how important it is that housing adaptations are now expedited?

Kevin Stewart: I thank Ms Ewing for what I think is a very important question. The coronavirus general guidance for safer workplaces provides examples of essential works. Adaptations are essential if they enable someone to be discharged from hospital or address an urgent health or welfare issue. There is no reason to delay necessary adaptations unless the occupants are shielding or choose not to have workers in their home. It is, of course, important for all risk assessments to take place to ensure that all health protection measures are in place to keep workers and householders alike as safe as possible while any essential work is carried out. However, that work should be carried out, as it is essential.

Affordable Homes (Target)

8. Tom Mason (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to meet its target of building 50,000 affordable homes. (S5O-05072)

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning (Kevin Stewart): The latest published statistics to the end of September 2020 show that, since April 2016, we have delivered 36,046 affordable homes, over 24,000 of which were for social rent. That would have been an increased number, but the impact of Covid meant that there was a necessary pause in the delivery of affordable homes at such a critical time in our target period. However, we are continuing to work closely with all partners across the housing sector to deliver the remaining homes as quickly as it is safe to do so.

Tom Mason: I remind colleagues that I am a councillor in Aberdeen City Council. In line with Aberdeen's local outcome improvement plan, the council agreed that the on-going programme of 2,000 new homes will be built to the industry gold standard, which makes them greener and cheaper to run, with better natural light and sound insulation; provides a dedicated space for working or study and storage for an electric wheelchair; and will lead to a reduction in fuel poverty. Does the minister agree that that model would be ideal for similar projects across Scotland? Will he join me in welcoming the exemplary work of Aberdeen City Council's leadership in taking that plan forward?

Kevin Stewart: I have heard since 2012, I think, that the council in Aberdeen is going to deliver 2,000 council homes, but we have yet to see very many of those on the ground. The Government has given additional funding to Aberdeen, above

its resource planning assumptions, from moneys that were not spent by other local authorities. I hope for the sake of my own constituents that those homes will be forthcoming.

Obviously, I want to see quality improved throughout the country. With the Government's decarbonisation agenda to tackle our climate emergency, it is important that we continue to drive up quality. The Government has, of course, a number of pilots going on, including in Edinburgh, to ensure that we can do our level best in providing and delivering low-carbon, quality homes.

I hope that Mr Mason will go back to his colleagues in Aberdeen City Council and push them forward on delivering their promise of 2,000 homes.

Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): I would be grateful for the minister's views on the Tory Government's decision to slash the allocation of financial transactions and the impact that that will have on the support that is available to home buyers and the delivery of new homes.

Kevin Stewart: There has been a significant cut of 66.5 per cent in the total Scottish financial transactions budget in 2021-22. That is two thirds of a budget slashed by the United Kingdom Government, and it amounts to a reduction of £412 million. The Scottish Government has mitigated that as far as possible, but that cut has led to some difficult choices about the use of the allocation in 2021-22 and has, of course, resulted in a reduction in the first home fund budget and the need to close the main help to buy Scotland scheme.

I wish that Tom Mason and his colleagues, who continually go on at us about increasing the housing supply, would go to their Westminster colleagues and tell Rishi Sunak to give us that money back, because it is required to deliver homes to meet Scotland's need. It is a pathetic scenario that the UK Government has cut budgets to the extent that it has. Two thirds of a budget has been slashed.

The Presiding Officer: That brings us to the end of the communities and local government portfolio questions. I have just noticed in BlueJeans that that might be the last contribution from the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government, Aileen Campbell. This is certainly the last time that communities and local government portfolio questions are timetabled before the end of the session. I put on record my thanks to Aileen Campbell for her contribution over many years as a parliamentarian. [*Applause.*] That said, I might select a topical question for her between now and the end of the session, so she should not quite switch off yet.

I am also conscious that we are now in March and there are only three weeks left until the end of the session. There will be several opportunities, including in the debate later this afternoon, for members to make potentially their last contributions. I hope that we will be able to acknowledge that in a fitting manner.

Social Security and Older People

Low-income Households

1. James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on how its social security measures will support low-income households. (S5O-05073)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People (Shirley-Anne Somerville): Our new social security system is already increasing financial support to thousands of people on low incomes, including families with young children, carers and those who have lost loved ones. The budget forecasts that we will invest £3.5 billion in 2021-22. Some £435 million of that is for low-income households through the best start grant, the Scottish child payment, the carers allowance, the carers allowance supplement and funeral support payments.

The Scottish child payment is a game-changing intervention in our fight against child poverty. It is the most ambitious anti-poverty measure that is currently being undertaken anywhere in the United Kingdom, and it will make a direct and significant impact on the incomes of thousands of low-income families.

James Dornan: I noticed that the Northern Ireland Executive decided to provide a winter payment to recipients of disability benefits and pension credit. Would the Scottish Government consider a similar scheme?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I have looked with interest at what the Northern Ireland Executive has done in that regard.

The Department for Communities is responsible for delivering disability benefits and means-tested benefits, including pension credit, in Northern Ireland. The fact that it has the data and technical infrastructure to do that enables the Executive to agree the payment and deliver it relatively simply and at short notice.

When I considered a similar payment in Scotland, I noted that it would require the development of entirely new systems and processes, with complex dependencies on the Department for Work and Pensions that would take time to develop. That is one of my frustrations with the current devolved settlement.

Unfortunately, I therefore had to rule out a similar intervention.

However, the Scottish Government has committed more than £0.5 billion of additional investment to help people and communities during these difficult times. Alongside that, we have introduced the child winter heating allowance this year for the most severely disabled children with day-time and night-time care needs.

The Presiding Officer: I should have indicated that question 1 is grouped with question 8 in this question session, so I will turn to question 8 next, before taking supplementary questions.

Low-income Families with Children (Covid-19)

8. John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how its welfare policies have supported low-income families with children during the Covid-19 pandemic. (S5O-05080)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People (Shirley-Anne Somerville): Throughout the pandemic, the priority for Scotland's social security system has been to ensure that families continue to be paid the money that they rely on and that of our game-changing new Scottish child payment is delivered.

Alongside that, we have committed more than £0.5 billion of additional investment to support people and communities impacted by the pandemic, with a particularly strong focus on children and families. That includes £140 million to promote food security, of which £51 million was specifically invested to continue the provision of free school meals for eligible families during school closures and holiday periods. Our £100 winter hardship payment put £14.4 million in families' pockets, and we have committed to a further £16.8 million to reach up to 168,000 families through a spring hardship payment that is to be paid shortly. We have also introduced the £500 self-isolation support grant.

John Mason: Does the cabinet secretary feel that such policies could only work in Scotland, or could neighbouring countries such as England learn from them?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I am sure that all countries across the United Kingdom can learn from one another when it comes to what can be done to support people through the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond.

I agree that the UK Government could be doing more to support low-income families, particularly those on universal credit. I note that the chancellor has announced that the UK Government will continue the £20 uplift on universal credit until September. It is an unfortunate development that

the chancellor has gone that far and no further, because the fact that the £20 uplift was brought in shows, in itself, that universal credit was not fit for purpose and was not enough to live on in the first place. I therefore encourage the chancellor to look once again at that, and to update the legacy benefits, too.

Self-isolation Support Grant

2. Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government what the impact has been of widening the eligibility criteria for the self-isolation support grant. (S50-05074)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People (Shirley-Anne Somerville): From 16 February, we extended the eligibility criteria for the grant to anyone who needs to self-isolate if they earn the real living wage or lower; to applicants who are entitled to a council tax reduction because they are on a low income; and to people with caring responsibilities for someone over 16 who is asked to self-isolate, where the carer themselves meets the other eligibility criteria. Those changes mean that an additional 390,000 people could be eligible for the grant, should they require it, which will help to remove any financial barriers to isolating. We will begin reporting on the figures on the impact of the updated eligibility from April 2021.

Mark Ruskell: I look forward to seeing those figures.

As we make strong progress in suppressing the virus, the numbers will dwindle, but the importance of self-isolation will increase—it will be critical in order to prevent new variants from taking root. We have seen an example of that in Aberdeen this week. Does the cabinet secretary agree that, if low numbers of people need to self-isolate, we could make those grants unconditional, so that people self-isolate as quickly as possible—within hours—instead of waiting days or weeks before making a decision?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I agree with Mark Ruskell that we absolutely need to ensure that people understand and appreciate the importance of self-isolation. I think that they do; when we look at the levels of compliance across the country, we can see that people are taking this very seriously. I thank them for what they are doing.

As we have always done since we introduced the self-isolation support grant, we have worked with local authorities and others to see what more can be done to support people who are self-isolating. The eligibility criteria that we now have are wide enough to ensure that we provide support to people who are on low incomes and require that support.

More can be done to support people who are in self-isolation. In addition to the self-isolation support grant, there is also what we need to do to ensure that businesses encourage and support their employees to self-isolate, for example. I know that Mark Ruskell and some of his colleagues have been keen for the Government to look at that, so I assure him that we are looking at the situation in the round, and that we will continue to keep the support grant under review to see what else can be done to continue with this important part of our work on coronavirus.

Social Security Scotland (Cost)

3. Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what the most recent estimate is of the cost of establishing Social Security Scotland. (S50-05075)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People (Shirley-Anne Somerville): The programme business case, which was published in February 2020, describes implementation costs of £651 million to 2025-26. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has meant that we have had to replan our delivery schedule and, although we anticipate the phasing of the costs to change between years, we anticipate remaining within that overall figure.

We still expect Social Security Scotland's administration costs to align with the programme business case once the agency is in a steady state. The business case stated the cost of administration at around 5 per cent of the value of benefits paid, which is broadly comparable to the Department for Work and Pensions.

Finlay Carson: The benefits take-up report that the Scottish Government published this week outlines a range of reasons why people are unaware of their benefit entitlement. What specific work is the Social Security Scotland local delivery team in Dumfries and Galloway doing to ensure that my constituents understand and can apply for all the relevant benefits for which they might be eligible?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I point out to Finlay Carson that the Scottish Government has a benefit take-up strategy, unlike the United Kingdom Government. I hope that the UK Government will set up a take-up strategy because we are not responsible for all benefits up here. I would like all Governments to work together on that, and I recently wrote to the UK Government about it, along with my Welsh and Northern Irish colleagues.

Local delivery will play a valuable part in our agency's work with stakeholders to make them aware of what is being done in the local area, and

in its work to support individuals to provide information for an application form and to ensure that they feel supported during the process. Again, that is very different from the experience that people have of the DWP.

We are absolutely committed to having a benefit take-up strategy that works well, not just because it is our statutory duty to do so, but because it is the right thing to do for people. Of course, there is much more that could be done outwith local delivery work. Aileen Campbell's portfolio supports teams in Citizens Advice Scotland and other agencies to work on income maximisation, so that people across the country know what benefits they are entitled to. I would hope that all Governments across the UK could support that work.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): How many people throughout Scotland have received payments through the new social security system? What is next year's budget for payments?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: The Scottish Government provided more than £540 million in payments between the introduction of Social Security Scotland in September 2018 and 31 March 2020, through the delivery of eight benefits. By the end of the current financial year, the payments administered by the agency are forecast to support more than 113,000 people. As set out in the 2021-22 budget, and in line with the Scottish Fiscal Commission forecast, we are committing £3.5 billion in forecast social security payments, to reach more than 800,000 people. That money will go directly to the people of Scotland who need it most, including, of course, £68 million for the first full year of the Scottish child payment.

The Presiding Officer: Question 4 has not been lodged.

Scottish Child Payment

5. Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government how many Scottish child payment claims it has received for individual children and households, and how many have now been accepted and paid. (S5O-05077)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People (Shirley-Anne Somerville): The latest published management information shows that, by 28 February, Social Security Scotland had received 98,000 applications for the Scottish child payment. Of the 85,000 applications that had been received by 14 February, 55,000 applications had been processed by the end of February. That means that 65 per cent of the applications that were received before 15 February have now received a decision. In total, 52,000 of the processed applications were approved.

Parents and carers will receive a letter advising them of the outcome of their application in due course. Details of when people should expect their first payment and how much it will be will be contained in that letter. An application could contain more than one child. Further time is required to interrogate the decisions and payments data to be able to produce robust estimates of the number of children. More detailed information on application outcomes and payments, including an estimate of the number of children who have been approved for the Scottish child payment, will be included in the next release of official statistics, which will cover the period to the end of March and is due to be published on 11 May.

Mark Griffin: I am pleased that families are starting to receive this crucial payment. The cabinet secretary knows that up to 173,000 children are eligible for the payment. It has rightly been described as a game changer, but it is only a game changer if children actually get it. How does the cabinet secretary plan to reach all those 173,000 children and would the Government consider backdating the payment for up to a year for those who are perhaps unaware of their entitlement and apply later on?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: With reference to backdating, the system for the Scottish child payment has not been built with an ability to backdate. If we were to do that, as I explained to Mark Griffin before the Scottish child payment went live, we would have had to delay the go-live date for the payment and we felt that it was important to get the payment in as quickly as possible and for money to be received as quickly as possible. We will endeavour to do everything that we can. I referred in a previous answer to the benefit take-up strategy and I will give one example of what we have been doing on that.

We have written to the individuals we know of within the data feeds from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs and the Department for Work and Pensions, proactively inviting those people to apply, and we will continue to do that as more people access the qualifying benefits. That is an example of something that the agency has done before for best start grants and is now doing for the Scottish child payment, and we will continue to do that in the future as new people access the qualifying benefits.

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): Making people aware of the new payment is very important, as others have said. The cabinet secretary mentioned that the Government has contacted potential applicants who are receiving benefits. Is there any other way that the Government can make people aware that the new

benefit, which is a life changer, is available to the people who are entitled to it?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I can perhaps elaborate on what else we have done for the Scottish child payment. A lot of work has been done with key and trusted stakeholders, for example to ensure that they were aware of what was going on with the Scottish child payment and encouraging people in their networks to apply for it. A number of stakeholder road shows took place at the end of last year to support that work, and we are planning a multimedia campaign later this month, targeting parents through television and digital advertising. I gave one example to Mark Griffin and I hope that some of the other examples that I have given to Sandra White demonstrate how seriously we are taking that issue.

Loneliness and Isolation

6. Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what action the Minister for Older People and Equalities takes to ensure that its policies do not contribute to loneliness and isolation. (S5O-05078)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People (Shirley-Anne Somerville): We know that Covid has impacted communities, including many thousands of older people. That is why we have provided funding throughout the financial year. Our winter plan provided more than £6.5 million of targeted action on equalities, covering isolation and loneliness, and digital exclusion. In the spring of 2020, our £350 million communities funding support, which consisted of four funding streams, including a £50 million wellbeing fund, supported third sector activities in communities. The £12 million immediate priorities fund also provided investment, through national partners, to support Scotland-wide or multi-area work. That rapid response was a reflection of our concerns about the seriousness of the situation and our recognition of the need to support communities during the crisis.

Edward Mountain: Does the cabinet secretary agree that the time-and-task model for commissioning social care for elderly people, which sometimes involves little more than a 20-minute daily visit, should be scrapped, as it prevents carers and the recipients of care from having time to talk?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I am aware that Mr Mountain has had discussions on his time to talk campaign, which I understand he announced at the end of last year. He raises a fair point about our ability to ensure that we are looking after people and seeing that they receive good care, which I think we can all agree is what should happen. People might have different ideas about how that could be done and the different models

that could be used. I am sure that the work that Mr Mountain is doing in his campaign will tie in well with the work that we all want to achieve to ensure that people get the care that they rightly deserve and should have in their own homes. I am sure that Mr Mountain will continue his work on that campaign and will inform the Scottish Government of how we should proceed.

Social Security Scotland (Client Survey)

7. Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the report "Social Security Scotland Client Survey: 2018-2020". (S5O-05079)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People (Shirley-Anne Somerville): I welcome the report and, in particular, its key finding that 90 per cent of clients who responded said that their overall experience was either "very good" or "good". It is a credit to all Social Security Scotland staff that they were given that endorsement by clients, who were surveyed last year at a time when the agency's services and staff were also coping with the serious disruptions caused by coronavirus. The agency was established on the footing that its systems should be designed with the people of Scotland and be based on their evidence. The report demonstrates the Scottish Government's determination to live up to that commitment.

Of course, there will always be room for improvement, but the report's findings, including that the overwhelming majority of respondents—around 87 per cent—said they were treated with dignity, fairness and respect, are clear evidence of two things. First, they show where we are on our goal to deliver a Scottish social security system that has those values at its heart and that succeeds. Secondly, they show how far we have come on moving away from perceptions of the system operated by the Department for Work and Pensions.

Stewart Stevenson: The results of the survey are hugely encouraging and represent a welcome departure from the system that the United Kingdom Government operates, which the United Nations special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights described as

"punitive, mean-spirited and often callous".

What lessons does the cabinet secretary think the UK Government could learn from Scotland's social security system? Does she believe that people in Scotland should not be forced to accept toxic Tory policies?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: What we have achieved in social security in Scotland is testament to the hard work that has gone on both

within the Government and, importantly, with our key stakeholders and all the individuals with lived experience who have taken part in the process, so that we could deliver the system that we are now delivering on.

I should pay tribute to my predecessor in this role, Jeane Freeman—not only because she is sitting close to me in the chamber but because of her work in this portfolio before I took over, which laid the groundwork for the results that I am announcing today. The whole of Government can reflect on what can be done when we have lived experience at the heart of our policy making. That is a lesson not only for the Scottish Government but for all public agencies across the UK. It is the right way and the best way in which to make policy. I, for one, am very pleased that Ms Freeman took the opportunity to ensure that our social security system had that in its very bedrock when she set it up.

Primary Care

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Christine Grahame): Before we get on to the debate, I should mention that we have a little bit of time in hand. I know that members speaking in the open debate were expecting just three minutes for their speeches, but I can be really generous and allow four-minute speeches. Has that not made your day? I know that every politician here can talk for an extra minute without any encouragement from me.

The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-24247, in the name of Lewis Macdonald, on “What should primary care look like for the next generation?” I call Lewis Macdonald to speak to and move the motion on behalf of the Health and Sport Committee. Please proceed, convener.

14:46

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I am delighted to open this debate on the Health and Sport Committee’s report, “What should primary care look like for the next generation?” The title of the report is deliberately framed as a question, and I start by thanking all those who offered their answers from the point of view either of patients and the general public or of the healthcare professions, whose views we also sought.

I also thank all those who have supported me in my role as convener of the committee over the past three years. They include the clerking team, ably led by David Cullum, who, like me, has three more committee meetings to look forward to—the same is true for one or two other members in the chamber; the researchers of the Scottish Parliament information centre; the press and public engagement teams; and other Parliament staff, including the broadcast and information technology teams, who allowed the committee to continue to meet throughout the pandemic; members of the committee, past and present; and those witnesses who have shared their expertise with us on a vast array of subjects.

I thank ministers for their positive engagement in general and for a quick response to this report, in particular. Although there are many areas of agreement, there are other questions that will clearly be for the relevant committee to pursue in the next session of Parliament—and, hopefully, for the health secretary to answer in the next session. I will mention Jeane Freeman by name because of the work that she has done with the committee over the time for which I have been the convener. It is appreciated.

Our starting point for the report was to ask the public what kind of primary care service they

wanted to see; we then asked representatives of the healthcare professions whether the public's vision could be realised and, if so, how. We received more than 2,500 responses to our public consultation; we ran a session with the Scottish Youth Parliament, which surveyed its members; and we held detailed discussions with public panels over two weekends in Aberdeenshire, Lanarkshire and Fife.

The public told us that they wanted to be able to access primary care just as easily as they can access a community pharmacy, with weekend opening and longer hours, and to be able to make appointments online. They were clear that patient data should belong to the patient and that new technology could help to improve patient care.

Covid-19 delayed our report, but it accelerated some of the changes that the public told us they wanted to see. The next challenge will be how to provide the personnel, the resources and the governance structures to embed those positive changes in the future delivery of primary care.

Contrary, perhaps, to some interpretations, our report is supportive of general practitioners and seeks to make best use of their valuable time in seeing those who are in need of the skills that only they possess while, at the same, time making best use of the skills of each of the other professions in the wider multidisciplinary team.

There is broad consensus that primary care should be at the heart of the healthcare system, that care should be delivered by multidisciplinary teams and that patients should be able to access the right professional at the right time, to let them remain at or near home whenever possible. The challenge is how to turn that shared vision into reality. We believe that there are key roles for health and social care partnerships, for multidisciplinary teams, including GPs, and for the public.

Health and social care partnerships, as integration authorities, are responsible for the whole range of primary and community health services and account for more than a third of the total budget for health and social care, which, in turn, accounts for half of all expenditure by the Scottish Government. Partnerships themselves recognise that primary care needs to change if it is to align with a community approach. Edinburgh Health and Social Care Partnership told the committee:

“Primary care is not established to focus on the priorities of local communities—its priority is the (ill) health needs of individuals”.

Partnerships can help to change that, through their strategic commissioning plans and the localities that they have established. Primary care improvement plans should be in place very soon—

we might hear more about that from the cabinet secretary—and should reflect local needs and priorities.

Our report highlights early evidence from partnerships of the benefits that have been gained from changes in how services are delivered, such as improved use of GP time because patients are accessing other members of the multidisciplinary team.

GPs rightly want to remain at the heart of healthcare in the community. They recognise the key role of other professionals, from occupational therapists to district nurses. The change that we need is one in which doctors and patients reset expectations about who will help and in what way, so that support and care from each member of the multidisciplinary team is seen as of equal value when it is the care that the patient needs.

National workforce planning must take account of a shift in the balance of care from hospitals to the community. The committee is keen for the principles of the Health and Care (Staffing) (Scotland) Act 2019 to be put into practice as soon as possible.

The public told us that they want a more preventative approach and more emphasis on social prescribing, and those aspirations are reflected in our report. So, too, is the view of all healthcare professions and the general public that access to data in primary care must be improved, not least by having IT systems that talk to each other, so that health professionals can access information and patients have to tell their stories as few times as possible in order to receive the care that they need.

The Covid pandemic has been challenging for everyone who is involved in primary care—and health and care in general—but it can also be a starting point for the delivery of real and lasting change if we find ways to embed the improvements that have perforce been made in responding to the emergency over the past 12 months. I look forward to that happening, and I commend our report to the chamber.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the Health and Sport Committee's 8th Report 2021 (Session 5), *What should Primary Care look like for the next generation?* (SP Paper 939).

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can be a little generous to the opening and closing speakers, too. I do not want to make you feel disadvantaged in any way.

14:53

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport (Jeane Freeman): Thank you, Presiding Officer, for your generosity.

I welcome the report. Before I talk about it, I thank the members of the Health and Sport Committee with whom I have had the privilege of working—in particular, Mr Macdonald, the convener. I have found our engagement constructive, positive and helpful.

The committee's report is a helpful contribution to our current work on reforming primary care, and I am grateful to the committee not only for the report's contents but for the way in which the committee gathered evidence. The committee sought the views of not just health professionals but the public, especially younger people, who want to be engaged in how services are delivered now and in the future and who, in many ways, want their engagement to be different from that of older generations.

The committee raised a number of important questions and suggestions for how we can continue to strengthen primary care, and I have now formally responded. Much of what has been raised is, of course, for the next Parliament, Government and health secretary, but I hope that, as I say a few words now and in closing, I am able to give committee members reassurance that their report is being taken very seriously. Some of what they are asking for has already begun. Some of the thinking has certainly already begun.

Before I turn to the report, I restate my thanks to all primary care staff for their work, particularly during the past year. GPs and their practice teams, pharmacists, dentists, optometrists and allied health professionals have all responded tirelessly to the pandemic, continuing to provide essential services but also adapting to new ways of working—some of which point to new ways for the future—most recently, through their current and huge contribution to the vaccination programme. In many areas, such as digital, urgent care and multidisciplinary team working, the response to the pandemic has both benefited from previous investment in primary care and provided foundations for future reform.

I will now touch on some of the key findings from the committee's report—first, on the need to bolster and secure the role of multidisciplinary teams as part of a growing workforce in general practice. Since the landmark 2018 GP contract offer, we have invested £205 million in expanding and enhancing multidisciplinary teams across Scotland, with the number of GPs also having increased by 234 over that period. That significantly helps us to ensure that people can expect to see the right person at the right time,

whether that be, for example, by direct access to a pharmacist to manage medication or to a physiotherapist for musculoskeletal issues. That enables GPs to spend more time with those individuals who have complex care needs. In the current work on the redesign of urgent care, some of that investment is coming to fruition and we are seeing the real value of making sure that, in having the right care in the right place for individuals, primary care in its widest definition has an absolutely central role.

I also acknowledge the importance of improving access to general practice. For many, that is the first and often only point of contact with the health service when issues arise, and it is really important that we get that right. As I have said before in other places, for me, primary care in its widest definition is the foundation of our health service. It is where most of us will have most contact—for some, it will be their only contact—with our health service throughout our lives. It matters that we get that right—that it is accessible and that it addresses our needs. In saying that, I commend the work of our out-of-hours GPs, paramedics, dentists and other health professionals who provide urgent care services at evenings and weekends.

The report highlights that the citizen's voice must be at the heart of shaping our reform programme. That was also identified as a key theme in the recent independent review of adult social care, and I completely agree with that. This morning, I was party to a discussion with very senior members of the Scottish Government health directorate, looking at how we will continue to respond to the pandemic and at how we will build on many of the lessons of that and on some of those foundations. Central to that was how we ensure at every level of our development of health and social care services that we are able to hear the citizen's voice. In some ways, we can draw on lessons of how that has been done elsewhere in Government, but it matters greatly to me that we embed that approach as we develop innovative ways to hear what people are saying and to engage with them in the development of policy and in the reform of services that are vital to their health and wellbeing.

The report recognises the growing need for mental health support and the role of primary care in early identification and prevention. We are committed to further building mental health capacity and capability through the GP contract offer.

Social prescribing is also fundamental in supporting people to address the wider challenges that they face. That work was necessarily paused in response to the pandemic, but I am happy to confirm that it has been restarted and is being

embedded into our thinking. We are well on track to deliver on our commitment of an additional 250 community link workers by the end of this session of Parliament, which is but a few weeks away.

The report also rightly identifies that technology will play an increasing role in services in the future. Throughout our response to the pandemic, we have seen major shifts in the use of television and video consultations where that is the right approach, without reducing the importance of having face-to-face appointments where that is the right thing to do for both the patient and the clinician.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Despite my generosity, I must ask you to conclude.

Jeane Freeman: Finally, I will turn briefly to data in general practice—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We do not have time. I have given you an extra two minutes. Sorry, but I just want to be fair to people.

I call Donald Cameron to open for the Conservatives. I will be generous with you, Mr Cameron, but go at the same tempo, if you do not mind.

15:00

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I record my thanks to my colleagues on the Health and Sport Committee for their work on the report, and to the committee clerks for their efforts in producing it. I also thank those who gave evidence. Broadly speaking, I feel that we have a report that can set in motion a wider debate on how we deliver primary care services in the future.

I have long been of the view that, when we discuss the future delivery of health and social care in general, we should look not only at the next five years but at the next 25 years. We, in the chamber, need to ask ourselves how we would like to see such services being delivered when we are older, and what national health service and social care service we want to leave for future generations.

The committee's report covers a broad range of issues, including the general medical services contract, the future role of multidisciplinary teams and the status and purpose of integration joint boards going forward, to name but a few.

However, I will focus on the recommendations for general practice, which is an issue that the Scottish Conservatives have long believed needs to be debated properly and fully by Parliament. Before delving into some of the specific issues, I thank our doctors, nurses, ancillary staff, office staff and all those who work in general practice for

their efforts during the Covid-19 pandemic—in particular, for their role in the vaccination roll-out.

One of the more important aspects of the pandemic with which we require to grapple is its long-term impact on the health service. For instance, does it mean that we should pause or accelerate the changes that are under way? In its response to the committee's report, the Royal College of General Practitioners made a number of comments, including that it welcomes the

"focus on improving data sharing and technology within primary care ... which will bring huge benefits for patients and increase efficiency within the NHS."

Both the RCGP and the British Medical Association welcomed the recommendation that the Scottish Government should devise

"an information campaign to inform the public on what their primary care service will look like, what they can expect and when".

The RCGP stated that it would like to ensure that

"the target of increasing the GP workforce by 800 by 2027 is reached"

and that it wanted to

"see workforce numbers across the primary care multidisciplinary team bolstered".

I agree. Over the course of this parliamentary session, the Scottish Conservatives have consistently called for investment in additional GPs in order to address that particular aspect of the broader workforce crisis that we see in our NHS and social care services.

In particular, the committee report notes that

"more innovative approaches... were required to attract professionals to rural practices, where it was more difficult to recruit."

I represent the Highlands and Islands, so that is a pertinent point for me, given the real difficulties of recruiting GPs in remote and island communities.

In addition to the need to recruit more GPs, current data shows that the number of GPs who are aged over 60 and approaching retirement is at a 10-year high. In 2020, some 250 GPs were over 60 years old, and from 2010 to 2020 the number of GP practices decreased by 9 per cent. Therefore, it is clear that there are multiple challenges in general practice that we need to address to ensure that it is properly staffed and supported and can meet the demands of a growing and ageing population.

Patently, there is more that we need to discuss and debate about the future delivery of primary care services. I am afraid that, undoubtedly, general practice is facing a workforce crisis, as are other areas of our NHS. It is also evident that existing ways of delivering primary care might not be financially sustainable.

We need a primary care system that keeps pace with modern life, that embraces technology and, above all, that is shaped around the needs of patients. That is something the Scottish Conservatives will continue to focus on as we move forward.

15:04

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): I thank the committee for its excellent report. As we reach the end of the parliamentary session, it is timely that we debate what needs to happen next.

After 14 years of the Scottish National Party being in power, we have not seen the major changes in our NHS that Scottish Labour believes we need. Recruitment of staff, support for patients, greater focus on delivering in our communities and investment in preventative health are all vital. If we are to see a reduction in the pressures on our acute emergency services, the issues that are raised in the report need to be addressed urgently.

GP surgeries and primary care are fundamental to people's access to our NHS, so it is vital that capacity is provided when communities such as Musselburgh expand. The challenges that are posed by the Riverside medical practice there make the case for community concerns being acted on early. More work is required in GP and community services in relation to recruitment and making services more accessible to people where and when they need them, as well as in ensuring that patients are supported by digital records and systems and by robust data collection.

The issue of ensuring that services are more patient focused comes across strongly in the committee's report, through the consultation feedback that it received. Preventative healthcare, which is critical in terms of access to services and reducing health inequalities, has to be part of that agenda.

During the pandemic, the British Lung Foundation has raised the issue of people with asthma and respiratory conditions. It is shocking that people from low-income households are less likely to have good health outcomes in managing their conditions—[*Inaudible.*]—poorer health and shorter lives as a result of poverty comes across starkly in the evidence on health inequalities that is referred to in the report.

We must ensure that, as we come out of the pandemic, people who have Covid, especially long Covid, get the support that they need in their local communities. We need to think more about community health agendas. The report is strong on that.

Addressing mental health pressures for all age groups and supporting people's learning

disabilities and families who have experienced isolation will be critical issues for our health and social care partnerships in ensuring that we have the support that we need in our communities as people recover from Covid.

Over the past few weeks, constituents have been in touch with me about access to cancer testing and to call for increased awareness in our communities. For example, concerns about pancreatic cancer awareness and access to cervical tests and links to ovarian cancer for women have been raised. Early detection is critical, followed by treatment where it is needed, for all types of cancer. The more aware people are of symptoms to look out for and the better the information that they get, the better placed they will be to seek help and achieve better health outcomes.

I also want to thank the Royal National Institute of Blind People Scotland and Sight Scotland for their briefings about the importance of ensuring access to more work on preventing sight loss. That issue came up strongly in discussions that we had following the debate on the eye pavilion a few weeks ago. RNIB Scotland suggests a public awareness campaign to raise awareness of what people can do to support their eye health, and to encourage people to get their eyes tested. That relates to an issue in the report about the range of services that need to be available in local communities. We need a joined-up approach.

Investing in preventative health and in supporting people's access to a range of local health services and community prescribing is critical. If that is done strategically alongside measures to reduce pressures on families, address poor health and give people the opportunity to eat healthily and have access to decent exercise opportunities, those things should lead to better life chances and reduce the likelihood of, for example, obesity-related diseases.

Investing in preventative health will take pressure off our hospitals if it is followed through, but that does not mean that we will not need hospitals that are accessible centres of excellence. Let me take the opportunity to say that if we are to deliver good-quality sight-loss services and preventative treatment, we also need investment in the new eye pavilion for Edinburgh.

I hope that the Scottish Government will listen to the cross-party calls and the calls from clinicians and our constituents for a reversal of its decision and that it will act on them.

15:09

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I, too, take this opportunity to thank quite a few people. I

thank the committee clerks, who have already been mentioned and who worked hard during the inquiry. Committee members, regardless of party, worked well together. We may have disagreed on some matters, but we came to a conclusion, so I thank members for putting issues aside to work together as grown-ups for the benefit of the people of Scotland. I also thank members of the public and stakeholders who provided invaluable evidence and opinion during our panels. Their input was vital to the report.

The Health and Sport Committee's inquiry's remit included that it was to look at the sustainability of current primary care provision and at the shape it should take for the next generation; how it should provide care for a growing and ageing population and for people with complex medical conditions; and at governance changes. Those are just a few of the areas within the remit of the inquiry.

The inquiry began in 2019, which seems almost a lifetime ago, given what we have all endured recently. In the first phase, we heard from panels, primarily members of the public, in order to gather information. That was a necessary and vital step in understanding people's experience of primary care, and it allowed committee members to focus on users' needs. We heard directly from them about current delivery of services, whether it was working for them and what they thought the future of primary care services should look like. We all found it very interesting to listen to the public. It was not rocket science; it was about people and how the health service should work for them. The people who attended those public sessions certainly told us how the health service should work for them. I found that very interesting.

The second part of the inquiry focused on what we have at present, including current Scottish Government policies, integration joint boards and the role of GPs and other healthcare providers, including multidisciplinary teams and third sector organisations. That was quite an undertaking, particularly because those services have been under increased pressure due to the pandemic. It gave us an insight into the demands on our primary care providers and the impact on users.

I appreciate the cabinet secretary's response to the report's conclusions and I acknowledge the substantial steps that the Scottish Government has taken to date to reform primary care. The doubled primary care improvement fund, revised GP contract and support for multidisciplinary teams will go some way. I also acknowledge the support that the Scottish Government has provided for primary care services as a direct result of the pandemic.

The Government's vision of having a world-class public health service that delivers the right

care in the right place at the right time in order to improve population health and address inequality is very good, and I support it. The committee's report should provide further insight into how that can be realised. I have confidence in the Government and in the committee that that will be delivered.

15:13

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I welcome the report and believe that we must tackle the issues that it mentions. The report comes at the end of a parliamentary session, and I hope that it will not end up on the shelf, like many others, but will be used to make progress.

One of the report's key recommendations is that prevention must be prioritised and mainstreamed across all areas of health services and beyond. *[Interruption.]* Excuse the ice cream van outside, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I was looking round in an accusatory fashion at members in the chamber, but the noise is outside your hoose.

Alex Rowley: It is outside my office.

In 2011, the late Campbell Christie chaired a commission that looked at the future delivery of public services in Scotland. In that report, the key action that was required was to look at and invest more in prevention, not just with regard to health but across public services and in local government. Sadly, that has not happened. We are now coming to the end of this parliamentary session, in 2021, and a report is saying that a focus on prevention needs to be prioritised. I suggest that it should have been prioritised, and doing that is key if we are going to move forward.

In their current form, health and social care partnerships and the IJBs lack democratic accountability. They need to be reviewed, and we need to look at how they can be structured to function better than they do currently.

There has always been a tug between funding acute services and funding community care. In the Parliament last year, Alex Neil made a speech in which he talked about the need to introduce bridging funding, so that we can bridge the gap between less money going into acute services and more money going into primary care. Again, there has been a major failure, because we have failed to introduce that over the past number of years.

I will pick up on what the BMA and the Royal College of GPs said, which is that it is clear that, in Scotland, there are not enough GPs. They make the point that it should not be a choice between investing in and recruiting GPs or focusing delivery on other well-staffed workforce areas; it has to be both. The Government has made a commitment to

an additional 800 GPs. Perhaps in summing up, the cabinet secretary can advise on how that is progressing. Factors such as rising patient lists, an ageing population and ever more long-term conditions continue to pour pressure on GP services and health centre services and increase demands on GPs' time. Equally, GPs face restricted funding and premises that are not keeping pace with new demands for care, and they are now working through the Covid pandemic. That leaves our GPs exhausted and facing burn-out.

Before the previous election, there was a promise from many politicians that a new health centre would be built in Lochgelly, where I am sitting today, because the one that is here is not fit for purpose. It is the same situation in Kelty, the village that I come from, which also needs a new health centre. If we do not put the resources and facilities in at a community level, we cannot expect to get the results.

Although I am grateful for the extra time that you have given me, Presiding Officer, my time has been brief and there needs to be a much bigger debate. The committee's report highlights some of the issues, and I hope that the next Parliament gets to grips with the issue, because it is key for the future of all our health services that we get community care right.

15:18

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): As a member of the Health and Sport Committee, I offer my thanks to the clerks, everyone who gave evidence to the committee, and my fellow committee members for their hard work in contributing to the second phase of the inquiry.

We recognised that there have been multiple developments in primary care services in recent times, so we agreed that it was appropriate for us to look at the provision of services and approaches. Our principal aim was to consider whether they were meeting current needs and how they should be provided in the future.

It is clear that primary care requires a radical revision to ensure that everyone receives the primary care that they want and need for the next generation and beyond. A focus on prevention needs to be prioritised and mainstreamed across all areas of the health service and beyond.

The inquiry was driven by our work in hearing from the public what primary care services they want and need. When we began the second phase, the world was a very different place and the delivery of primary care has—negatively and constructively—been significantly affected by Covid-19. The many challenges that the pandemic

has presented have advanced positive and potentially sustainable changes in primary care.

Across our society, largely thanks to technology, the 9-to-5 work day is quickly becoming obsolete, and the current delivery methods and model of 9-to-5 primary care services, five days a week, are no different—they are not keeping pace with modern living.

The necessity of finding new ways of working has led to the discovery of many benefits for patients and practitioners. It is recognised that digital services can bring many exciting opportunities, and it is vital that they are embraced. They include the continued provision of phone and video consultations, when appropriate, because they offer greater patient choice and more flexibility in people's day-to-day lives, and they reduce the need to travel. I welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to improving IT and to supporting health boards in the transition.

During our evidence sessions, the committee heard from panel members who recognised and stressed that primary care services do not operate in isolation from other local services and environments, and who were keen to see a community-wide approach to wellbeing. Indeed, that vision is shared by the Scottish Government, as we look to a future where multidisciplinary teams work together to support people in the community and free up GPs to spend more time with patients in specific need of their expertise.

The message that delivery of healthcare is about seeing the right person in the right place at the right time is important. All professionals who are involved in patient care have a leadership role to play, which will require collaborative working with a wide variety of professionals who are involved in primary care multidisciplinary teams. To that end, I am pleased that significant progress has been made. There has been a substantial increase in the workforce in order to develop multidisciplinary teams, and the primary care improvement fund to recruit multidisciplinary teams has doubled from £55 million to £110 million this year, with a further increase to £155 million in 2021-22.

I welcome the recommendations in the phase 2 report, which highlights how the lessons that we have learned can be applied in the future to improve the delivery of our care and support systems in Scotland. We are all keen to get back to business as usual, but it is only by understanding how primary care has changed since lockdown, and for whom, that we can direct the focus and ensure that those with the greatest need get the right help. I also welcome the Scottish Government's response to the phase 2 report and the continuing focus on delivering a

world-class public health system that delivers the right care in the right place at the right time to improve the population's health and to address inequalities.

15:21

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

It has been a great honour to serve on the Health and Sport Committee for the past few years. I, too, thank all fellow members—I see that several of them are in the chamber—the hard-working clerks, SPICe and, of course, the Government minister Jeane Freeman, who is standing down at the next election. I thank the cabinet secretary for all her efforts over the past number of years.

This has been an excellent debate, with thoughtful and insightful contributions from across the chamber—not least from my Labour colleagues Sarah Boyack and Alex Rowley and, of course, the convener, Lewis Macdonald, who has convened the committee in a very helpful and affable way.

As the cabinet secretary said, the report is a very helpful contribution not just because of its contents but because of the way in which the committee gathered the information. I will say a little bit about that later. Those comments were echoed by Donald Cameron, who focused on general practice and talked about the future workload crisis. There were also helpful contributions from Sandra White and David Torrance.

As we have heard, and as the cabinet secretary said, primary care is often people's first point of contact with healthcare services. In many cases, we equate primary care with general practice and all the excellent work that is carried out in that regard. However, if the global pandemic has confirmed anything—if confirmation is necessary—it is that healthcare is a 360-degree package. It is about mental health care, emergency care, preventative care and long-term palliative and recovery work, which all need to knit together on a multidisciplinary basis to ensure healthy lives for people in Scotland.

For many years, I have been concerned about the appalling health inequalities in Scotland, where, in simple terms, the poor die younger than the rich. When I was working on my members' business debate on the Dewar report—the 1912 inquiry into health services in the Highlands and Islands—I was struck by the appalling problem of health inequalities in the Highlands and Islands at that time. We might argue that the problem exists now to a different degree, but it still exists and we need to tackle it. That will certainly be a job for the new Government and the Parliament in its new session after the election.

As we heard, the report that the committee published in 2019 predominantly focused on the experiences and views of members of the public—the service users of healthcare. Although I have been on lots of committees over my 14 years in the Parliament, it was probably the first time that I have been involved in such an innovative way of interacting with the public. If I remember correctly—I am looking at Lewis Macdonald—we spent a very pleasurable day in Inverurie, talking to ordinary members of the public about what they wanted to see in relation to health. We planned it like something in the first year of a planning degree. I thought that the visit was extremely useful, and the feedback was extremely good. I hope that the new Parliamentary committees consider that structure carefully. Across the board, there was a resounding call for a more patient-centred approach as well as an increase in preventative wellbeing care.

We considered the role that technology should play. A number of members have considered that issue. As I represent the Highlands and Islands, I have been concerned about it for some time.

I refer members to the fit homes project, which many of them will be aware of. The concept behind it is that a home should adapt to the changing needs of its residents. If members have an opportunity, I recommend that they look at Invergordon Carbon Dynamics, which makes homes for that fantastic project.

Technology in healthcare is key in the Highlands and Islands, as the rurality and peripherality of many of my constituents often makes access to the right health professional at the right time difficult.

Clearly, Covid-19 has had a drastic impact on our healthcare, and it was right that we took stock and focused on the pandemic in front of us. That led to divorce diversion. I said "divorce diversion", but I meant to say "resource diversion" and staff burn-out—[*Interruption*]. Many a true word is said in jest, Presiding Officer.

There needs to be a process of rebuilding and renewal. However, we cannot go back to normal business.

The Government responded to the report on 1 March and, as far as my quick reading went, it looks like it responded positively to the recommendations. I look forward to seeing the action taken on this great report, and I remember the words of Thomas Edison, who said:

"Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work."

Let us roll our sleeves up and get to work.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I hope that that was not a Freudian slip, and that all is well with Mrs Stewart.

15:26

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I am delighted to close this crucial debate on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives. Such an important topic deserves more time than the short debate that we are now having. Nonetheless, it has been a good and consensual debate across the chamber.

I thank my committee colleagues for the consensual way in which we have managed to work during this parliamentary session. It has been an honour to serve with them.

I have long suggested that a change in the way in which we deliver healthcare has to happen, because the current trajectory is unsustainable. The increasing percentage of the Scottish budget that is allocated to health has to reach a ceiling at some point. That is against the backdrop of Scotland's unwanted ill health tag—we are the unhealthiest nation in Europe and the unhealthiest small country in the world. The impact of that on the wellbeing of the people of Scotland, not to mention the Scottish economy, is significant.

If Covid has taught us nothing else, it has surely taught us about the impact that health has on the economy. Poor health also specifically impacts the outcome of a positive Covid-19 diagnosis, with obesity, diabetes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and heart conditions present in an overwhelming number of Covid deaths.

Shifting investment further upstream toward a more preventative approach is essential to the sustainability of our health service, and the committee's report agrees. There is a need for a shift in primary care to focus more on the needs of local communities and less on ill health, and for a shift on health that is closer to the community rather than on the secondary healthcare system.

To be fair, the Scottish Government has accepted that as the direction of travel that it would like to follow. The issue is that the practical steps that will be required to attain that ambition are yet to be put into play.

The most basic need to enable our GPs to be as effective as they can and want to be is the need for time. They need time to spend with patients to fully explore their needs. Crucially, a variety of treatment options should also be available to the GP to allow them to treat the patient in the most appropriate way.

The roles of allied healthcare professionals, pharmacists and occupational therapists need to be integrated to a much greater extent into GP

multidisciplinary teams. A simple example of that is that a physiotherapist is more likely to be specifically qualified to deal with musculoskeletal conditions than a GP, as the cabinet secretary mentioned. Given that one fifth of all patients present with MSK conditions, it would seem logical that, if a GP had the ability to triage those cases to a physio within the practice, not only would the potential outcome for the patient improve, but the GP would save a significant amount of time that could be spent with other patients.

The same could be said of dieticians, opticians and mental health practitioners, who will be needed increasingly post-Covid. We need to have those alternatives to the overuse of medicating poor mental health.

Continuity of care is a challenge for GPs, but the committee's report states:

"by better utilisation of the other healthcare professionals, including AHPs, we consider increased continuity of care should be achievable".

It goes on:

"We are clear AHPs, and others, play an invaluable role in enabling people to live an active life and encourage the Scottish Government to include the full range of staff involved in supporting health care when planning future workforce."

The work that the third sector and others do to support patients must be fully integrated and incorporated into local planning, and that must include the ability of GPs and HSCPs to use social prescribing, giving patients the potential to be active participants in solving their health and wellbeing issues. The committee states:

"Efforts must be made to make social prescription accessible to all, including making better use of ... community facilities".

It adds:

"We reiterate the recommendation made in our December 2019 report, Social Prescription, an investment, not a cost, that 5% of Integrated Authority budgets should be allocated for social prescription."

Public Health Scotland has a significant role in working with GPs and public agencies to enable and encourage that direction of travel.

In the current crisis, there is a clear and present danger to the third sector. Too many organisations are at a financial corner and may not be there when we come out of the Covid pandemic, which will be when we need them the most.

We all agree on the outcomes that we would like. That is extremely positive. So far, however, there has been little from the Scottish Government in response that suggests that plans are in place that can lead to those crucial outcomes and deliver primary care for the next generation. I look

forward to hearing the cabinet secretary's response.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Jeane Freeman to close for the Scottish Government.

15:31

Jeane Freeman: I am afraid that I am going to disappoint Mr Whittle in that, in the time that I have available, I will not be able to go through all the plans. However, I will happily do that on another day.

I start with what I did not say in my opening speech on the question of data, which the committee rightly identifies as critical. I assure the committee that work is under way on that, building on the progress that has been made in response to the pandemic and in discussion with the BMA and the RCGP. Work is also under way on what more can be done to give the citizen access to their health data and health advice, using some of the learning from building our test and protect app. That is actively under way as we speak.

I confirm, as the convener asked me to, that work has been restarted on implementation of the Health and Care (Staffing) (Scotland) Act 2019. That is a very important act and it will come into its own in relation to the independent review of adult social care.

The pandemic did not start the reform of primary care. Primary care, which is provided by GPs, dentists, pharmacists, optometrists and their teams, has benefited from sustained and record investment under this Government, and our primary care reform focuses on new models of care that put individuals at the centre of decision making.

While the pandemic has paused some work, it has accelerated work in other critical areas. I would argue that the role of community pharmacy is now much better understood and embedded in primary care than it was pre-pandemic. The use of digital technology is now widespread across primary care and it is moving into secondary and acute care, improving access for the citizen but also providing speedier care and more accessible care. Community pathways were initially stood up to respond to Covid, but they are now a central element in the redesign of urgent care.

Importantly, there is increased partnership working between primary, secondary and community care and the third sector. That is providing a foundation in, for example, patient-centred diagnosis and care, which is specifically relevant to how we respond to issues around long Covid. We have the primary care team as the central holder of care for the individual, but it can use digital technology to access specialist, peer-

to-peer support in order to determine whether further tests, diagnosis and intervention are necessary.

The centre for sustainable delivery was stood up during the pandemic response. It is situated at the Golden Jubilee hospital, but it has the very specific job, as a stand-alone centre, of getting us past that thing that has bedevilled us for so long—having examples of good practice and good delivery that are not rolled out across the country. A central part of the centre for sustainable delivery—I know that Mr Whittle will welcome this—is to make sure that, where we have good examples of the use of social prescribing linked to primary care, we roll them out across the country, as well as other innovations that exist more in the acute setting.

The workforce is, of course, the central underpinning of any improvement in primary care. We have more GPs per head of population in Scotland than elsewhere in the UK. We have increased the number of student nurses in training, with their fees paid, of course, and with the bursary. We will have trained 500 advanced nurse practitioners by the end of this year. We are increasing the number of pharmacist training posts and the number of paramedics, and we are on track for 800 additional GPs by 2027. However, what is critical is not to be thirled to plans that were in place previously but to recognise that, if we are going to improve primary care, we need to review constantly the skill mix that is needed and therefore the workforce planning that is right to deliver it. That is all currently part of our forward planning work. I doubt that we will have time to advise the chamber of the work before the parliamentary session ends, so I intend to write to all MSPs advising them of the work that is under way in forward planning for the rebuilding of our health and social care service.

Again, I thank the committee for what is a very helpful report. I assure the committee of the Government's commitment to taking forward its recommendations within the overall planning for that foundation—I repeat—of our NHS: our primary care.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before I call Emma Harper to speak, I warn members who will be in the next debate that we are running slightly early and that that debate will follow on from this one, so they should be getting themselves to the chamber.

I call Emma Harper, deputy convener of the Health and Sport Committee, to close for the committee.

15:36

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): In closing on behalf of the committee, I will reflect on

members' comments. I note that our committee convener has chaired the committee well and I thank him for his contribution to the Parliament over the past 22 years. He has also been a great support to me as deputy convener.

It is important to note that much of our work in relation to the phase 2 primary care report was carried out before the Covid pandemic, so the report has been significantly delayed as a consequence of Covid-19. I thank all who contributed to the report, including my colleagues on the Health and Sport Committee and the clerks.

Many of the committee's recommendations on primary care structures and accessing general practitioners and members of the multidisciplinary team have changed a lot due to the safer engagement practices that are required to reduce the risk of the virus spreading. The cabinet secretary has already affirmed that around 90 per cent of all health contacts take place in primary care, so it is important that we look at primary care and how we can ensure that we have the best processes as we move forward. We know that primary care is provided by many professionals in the multidisciplinary team, with GPs at the helm. From the outset, though, our inquiry looked at the Scottish Government's vision for the future of primary care services, which states:

"People who need care will be more informed and empowered, will access the right professional at the right time and will remain at or near home whenever possible. Multidisciplinary teams will deliver care in our communities and be involved in the strategic planning of our services."

The committee endorsed and shared that view and, through the inquiry and our report, has made a number of recommendations that we hope will inform and assist the Government's implementation of its vision.

The need for change in social care is compelling, as demands and costs are predicted to grow sharply. We debated aspects of the report of the independent review of adult social care in Scotland, which was led by Derek Feeley, in Parliament the week before last. Scotland's older population is living longer and folks have many complex health issues and multiple comorbidities. We know that the overall health and social care budget in Scotland in 2020 exceeded £15 billion and, for the first time, was 50 per cent of the entire Scottish budget. The committee and our witnesses are clear that we agree with the Government that that trajectory for increased resources cannot continue indefinitely. Mr Whittle raised the issue of financial sustainability in his earlier remarks.

To that end, our evidence indicated that primary care should take on a more patient-centred approach. One example that was cited was having more flexible appointment systems. I am very aware that our GPs already spend long hours in

their practices. David Torrance spoke about the modern 9-to-5 life. I have checked with a few of our practices in Dumfries and Galloway, and I know that they are already offering appointments either side of the 9-to-5 schedule and that evening consultation hours have already been adopted. In many instances, flexible appointment schedule times were implemented pre-pandemic or pre-lockdown. That was good to see.

We have heard how the current heavy reliance on paper as opposed to IT systems has caused much frustration in primary care. Many IT systems do not talk to each other.

Easy and accessible signposting to other services that might be available as opposed to people always having to visit their GP was also suggested.

I support the Scottish Government's response that it recognises the value of social prescribing and that it has established a working group to help to address that. Throughout the pandemic, we have heard about how important the third sector is to health and wellbeing and in helping to support physical and mental health.

The cabinet secretary has covered some of the key findings, including on community pharmacists, the £205 million for expanding and enhancing the multidisciplinary teams, and changes to urgent care. The right care in the right place at the right time is a commitment from the Government. The cabinet secretary also supported further funding for mental health and work on data improvements.

Donald Cameron focused on specific GP issues and the challenge of general practice recruitment, and Sarah Boyack mentioned the challenges for people with poor lung health, asthma and long Covid. The briefing that was submitted by the British Lung Foundation and Asthma UK dealt with those.

Alex Rowley spoke about the balance of funding between acute and primary care, and the bridging funding. I know that Alex Neil has talked about pump priming in previous debates.

Colleagues, including Brian Whittle in his closing speech, have mentioned addressing health inequalities and obesity. The cabinet secretary covered much work that is already under way and workforce planning. My colleagues Sandra White and David Stewart talked about the specific public engagement sessions that informed our report.

Presiding Officer, I am not sure of the time, but I am happy to conclude.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is a good idea. You got there before me.

Emma Harper: Last year was an incredible year, and this year is starting with further

engagement in tackling the pandemic. I look forward to the future and thank everybody who has contributed to helping to support everyone through the pandemic so far.

Scotland's Recovery

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-24263, in the name of Monica Lennon, on Scotland's recovery.

15:44

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): It has been said many times during the pandemic that we are all in it together. However, although Covid has thrown us all into the same storm, we are most definitely not all in the same boat.

The inequalities that have long existed in our economy and society have affected people's survival chances and resilience. Therefore, across the United Kingdom, the actions and inactions of Governments and decision makers before and during the pandemic must be scrutinised, and we must learn from them as we plan for Scotland's recovery.

The poorest people in our country are two and a half times more likely to die from the virus. That is a scandal, and it should shame all of us in this Parliament that one in four children in Scotland are in poverty—and the number is increasing. The next Parliament must not only overcome the virus but overcome poverty and work towards being an anti-poverty Parliament. Far from being an equaliser, Covid-19, and some of the decisions taken by Government in response to the pandemic, have exacerbated structural inequalities

The journey through this public health crisis is not yet over. Vaccines, we hope, are the light at the end of the tunnel. As a result of the vaccines, and tests and treatments, we will get through this. The trauma suffered by our economy and living standards, however, will reverberate for many years unless we take bold action now.

With some 21 days until the pre-election recess, it is only right that we devote some of the remaining time to debating Scotland's recovery, the risks that face our citizens and the challenges that the next Parliament must rise to. Scotland is facing a crucial transition. The election is in 64 days and our country remains in the grip of a global pandemic. We need a Parliament of MSPs who will do the hard work to fight for and deliver a people's recovery to reshape our economy and make it fairer for all.

Women are disproportionately impacted by job disruption as a result of Covid-19. They are also more likely to lose their job in the anticipated recession. Since July, women have accounted for the majority of furloughed workers in Scotland. Women make up the majority—some 77 per

cent—of key workers in care, early years and childcare, nursing and supermarkets, but they are undervalued, underpaid and underprotected. Research by Close the Gap has concluded that more effective utilisation of women's skills and talents could be a catalyst for economic growth, worth up to £17 billion to Scotland's economy. Women's employment must be central to Scotland's recovery.

That is not just a Scottish issue, of course—it is a worldwide challenge, and Scotland should be seeking to tackle it head on. In the past couple of weeks, US Vice-President Kamala Harris warned that, in one year, the pandemic has put at risk decades of the progress that we have collectively made for women workers. Our economy cannot recover fully unless women can participate fully. I agree with Vice-President Kamala Harris.

We are also facing the worst jobs crisis in a generation, with young people set to be hit particularly hard. There is significant evidence that, during a recession, people below the age of 25 are more likely to be let go by employers, and less likely to be hired, than older workers. More must be done to ensure that we do not lose a generation of workers to the pandemic.

If we do not act, it is clear that the consequences of the pandemic will scar our economy for decades to come. The recent "Fair Work in Scotland" report reveals that Scotland will not meet the ambition of becoming a fair work nation by 2025 unless bold and urgent action is taken now.

It is extremely disappointing, therefore, that the Scottish Conservatives' contribution to the debate is to seek to remove the reference in my motion to exploitative and low-paid work. Denying the existence of the underlying problems in our economy is certainly not the way to achieve fair work; in fact, the attempt to remove that reference says all that people need to know about the Tories' attitude to workers in Scotland.

Scottish Labour is supportive of the devolution of employment law, with a UK floor built in as proposed by the Scottish Trades Union Congress, so we are able to support the Scottish Government amendment. However, we do not want a race to the bottom on workers' conditions. In this Parliament, we should be encouraging a race to the top.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Does the member consider that the UK Government should either increase the statutory minimum wage or allow us to do that?

Monica Lennon: Labour members want an increase not just to the statutory minimum wage but to the real living wage. I will come on to the importance of that in a moment.

Before Mr Mason intervened, I was going to say that, with greater powers over employment law, there is more that we could do, such as getting rid of the anti-trade union act that the Tories brought in. We could also do more on the living wage across Scotland. However, I say to Mr Mason and his colleagues that not having those powers is not an excuse or cover for inaction on the part of the Scottish Government. I will come to that later. I hope that we mostly agree that we need to put workers' rights at the heart of the recovery.

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I ask Monica Lennon to answer the question that John Mason asked. Also, can she tell Parliament why Labour did not support the inclusion of employment law in the Smith commission's recommendations, even though the STUC and the Scottish National Party supported it?

Monica Lennon: I make it clear to Parliament that not only does Scottish Labour support the Government, but it is our policy to make a positive case for the devolution of employment law. When we come to the chamber to agree with the Government, it is a shame that that is not enough for Sandra White and John Mason. They want to go back to the arguments of 2014, while we want to focus on the future.

We could talk about this Government's record—I think that that is why I am getting some interventions. For example, the Scottish Government, local authorities, the national health service and other public bodies spend around £11 billion per year on goods and services. The financial clout of the state could be used for good, but the most recent annual report on procurement in Scotland shows that just 100,000 jobs were supported from £10 billion of public sector procurement contracts, and less than 1 per cent of small and medium-sized enterprises benefited from procurement spend. That is huge missed opportunity and it is not down to the Tories in Westminster; it is down to the SNP in Edinburgh. Scotland's Government has missed a huge opportunity to act to bring about fair work in the economy—

The Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills (Jamie Hepburn): Will the member take an intervention?

Monica Lennon: I want to make some progress.

We need progressive procurement. I hope that the minister will agree with that.

Jamie Hepburn: Will the member give way on that point?

Monica Lennon: I will continue.

The public sector must not reward companies and organisations that engage in blacklisting,

operate zero-hour contracts and pay below the living wage. It should reward companies that have fair work and sustainability at their hearts, grow local businesses and support those who have struggled as a result of the pandemic.

We need bold action and investment to stimulate a green and just recovery in Scotland that creates highly skilled and well-paid jobs in the sectors of the future to stave off the prospect of sustained high levels of unemployment.

We need to raise productivity and living standards to tackle poverty and ensure high-quality public services, not more cuts to local government that come from the Government. We need to reduce social, economic and regional inequality. We need a recovery for all Scotland.

We need to decarbonise the economy and tackle environmental breakdown, in line with Scottish Labour's target of reaching net zero by 2045.

Scottish Labour is committed to achieving full employment. With the private sector already suffering, the only way to stop rising unemployment is for the state to act. Scottish Labour has a bold plan to invest in skills and infrastructure, including social infrastructure, that will improve our quality of life, tackle climate change and create good jobs.

On support for businesses, we know that lockdowns have been necessary, but they have placed enormous financial strain on many businesses, including, in particular, smaller firms that do not have cash reserves. Scottish Government schemes have helped some firms to stay afloat but, for others, support has been patchy and difficult to access. It is estimated that up to one third of those businesses could struggle to repay Government-backed loans, meaning that there is a significant risk that many Scottish businesses could face insolvency.

Around 1 million jobs depend on Scotland's small business and self-employed community. Harnessing the power of Scotland's small firms to create jobs will be key to our recovery from the pandemic, and we must see more support for the businesses that are most at risk. I have not been able to follow everything that the chancellor has said today, but I and, I am sure, my colleagues across the chamber are aware that self-employed people have been begging for support for a year—again, it is a case of too little, too late with the Tories.

Our motion also mentions community wealth-building. Radical change can be achieved when there is political will in the Parliament, and community wealth-building is one example of where powers need to be harnessed.

Councillor Joe Cullinane and the Labour-led council in North Ayrshire launched Scotland's first community wealth-building strategy last year. Its aim is to repurpose the local economy so that it works for local people and protects the environment. As part of the economic recovery, our collective aim should be to replicate nationwide the success that has been seen in North Ayrshire.

I mentioned some of the key workers who have kept our country going and looked after the people in most need. I was really pleased when Parliament came together to include the social care support fund the emergency legislation that we passed, ensuring that low-paid care workers did not have to make do on statutory sick pay or go without any wage at all. That showed the political will to act, and we acted. However, we need to look beyond that and see how we can make those conditions more permanent for the future.

I lost a bit of time with interventions, so I will conclude. We need a recovery that puts people first, especially all those key workers who have kept the country going and those who have been most affected by the harms of lockdown. Scottish Labour will go into the election to put forward the case for doing things differently, because Scotland has been unequal for too long.

I am confident that we will get through the storm of Covid together, but we need to enact bold change and pursue a green recovery that leaves no one behind. As the country heads to the polls in 64 days' time, that vision of reshaping our economy and society should be front and centre. We are determined that the next Parliament should be about rebuilding and reshaping the economy to build a people's recovery that delivers fairness for all. That is the choice that the country faces and is why we will continue to make the case for a fairer future.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament believes that the next parliamentary session must be focused on rebuilding the economy for all of Scotland after the COVID-19 pandemic and addressing the structural inequalities that the pandemic has exposed in society and the opportunities that have been continually missed to deliver for workers and transform the exploitative, low-wage economy; calls therefore on the Scottish Government to recognise the need for a bold system change and for urgent action to make Scotland a Fair Work Nation, including prioritising greater support for disabled workers, ethnic minorities, women and young workers who often experience poorer work outcomes and are often more heavily concentrated in precarious and low-paid work; adhering to fair work principles, calls for further support for businesses and sectors hit hardest, to protect and create jobs, and agrees that the green economic recovery must be people-centred and incorporate community wealth building opportunities in order to drive success, wellbeing and prosperity for individuals, businesses and communities across the whole of Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you for speaking to time, Ms Lennon. Perhaps I should have made it clear at the beginning that, for once, we have plenty of time for people to take interventions, but it was still much appreciated.

15:56

The Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills (Jamie Hepburn): I thank Monica Lennon for bringing the debate to the chamber and welcome her to her new role, although I know that it is not the one that she had hoped for. There is not long left in this parliamentary session, but, in the time that we have available, I look forward to any exchanges that we may have.

The debate is an opportunity to highlight the work that is being done across Scotland to support a fair and sustainable recovery and for me to restate the Scottish Government's absolute commitment to making Scotland a fair work nation. In that regard, I say at the outset that, as Monica Lennon has indicated for Labour, we will not be supporting the Tory amendment for the very same reasons as those that Ms Lennon laid out. I welcome her support for our amendment. I will not linger too long on the point that Sandra White made about where we could be right now if those powers had been taken forward as part of the Smith commission process and vested in our hands, but it is welcome, if somewhat belated, that the Labour Party's position has changed.

Suppressing Covid-19 and ensuring the safety of Scotland's population more widely and Scotland's workforce more specifically is, rightly, a priority and may remain so for some time yet. Since March 2020, to protect jobs during the pandemic, we have committed more than £1.2 billion to drive recovery by, for example, bringing forward capital investment, and we have invested more than £3 billion in direct support for business, including for the newly self-employed. As Ms Lennon mentioned, they are people who have been overlooked by the UK Government's approach.

I recognise that we have an opportunity not simply to go back to how things were, but to address many of the deep-seated and structural challenges that our country faces in building back greener, fairer and stronger and ensuring an inclusive, resilient and more equal wellbeing economy for Scotland. We moved swiftly in the spring of last year and, as a first step, established the independent advisory group on economic recovery to advise us on priorities. The group recognised the importance of people to our economic recovery, centred on fair work. Through fair work first we are applying fair work criteria such as payment of the real living wage, tackling the gender pay gap and promoting more diverse

workforces to more of our public spending, which is helping to create and support secure and meaningful jobs and driving change across workplaces.

Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The minister mentioned a wellbeing economy. However, under the SNP, Scotland has declined from 16th place to 21st place in the international rankings for wellbeing. Will he explain why?

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): Universal credit.

Jamie Hepburn: The very response that I might have given was made from the back benches.

It is interesting that Mr Lockhart seeks to absolve his party of any responsibility in the handling of the Scottish economy. I will make the point that I want to see such powers vested in the hands of this Parliament, of which he is a member, in areas such as universal credit and employment law, which would help to drive the creation of a wellbeing economy. He would rather take a different approach.

In response to the situation and the circumstances in which we find ourselves, we must maintain a focus on the cohorts of our population whom we know are already disadvantaged in the labour market and who will become further disadvantaged if we do not get our response right.

Monica Lennon was quite right to mention the position of women in our economy. Our gender pay gap action plan remains important, as do our action plan for women in enterprise and our women returners programme. Those all represent a specific response to the position of women in the economy and will become of ever greater importance as we respond to and recover from Covid-19.

We remain committed to at least halving the disability employment gap. We have extended the fair start Scotland programme for a further two years, which will support unemployed disabled people and those with health conditions or other barriers to move into fair and sustained work.

We know from previous economic downturns that young people are particularly hard hit economically in such circumstances. Our young person's guarantee is such that, within two years, every person aged between 16 and 24 will benefit from that programme, and we have already committed £60 million in this financial year to supporting its implementation.

I also know that flexible working is crucial to many workers, including those with caring responsibilities, as it enables them to access and sustain good-quality jobs. This year, more than any other, has shown that, for many organisations,

flexible working—albeit in unusual circumstances that were probably not an ideal test bed—can work effectively. We will continue to support Timewise and the flexible jobs index in advancing the flexible working agenda.

Support for ethnic minority workers will be central to our recovery. That is why, later this month, we will hold a public sector leaders summit on race equality, which will help to shape future fair work actions.

Community wealth building has been mentioned. The Scottish Government is a supporter of that approach as a practical approach to local economic development that supports the delivery of our wellbeing economy for our country. Building on the work that is already under way in Ayrshire through the growth deal, we are supporting the development of community wealth building in five different geographies across Scotland, working with local partners to produce action plans in each. Such plans are designed to focus on understanding the practical changes that will be needed if we are to build local economic resilience as a means of delivering better outcomes.

We are investing in a green recovery. Between the programme for government and the climate change plan update, which was published in December, we have now committed to allocating £2 billion of additional capital funding over the next parliamentary session to the delivery of low-carbon and natural infrastructure as part of our just transition to net zero.

Monica Lennon's motion rightly highlights the structural inequalities that must be tackled. I hope that, in my opening remarks, I have demonstrated that we are committed to rising to that challenge. However, we could go further if we had the requisite powers. The law defines much of our experience of the world of work, and, in the Scottish Government's estimation, the Scottish Parliament should have responsibility for employment law. Given that, we would seek to legislate for a real living wage, against firing and rehiring, for the repeal of the pernicious Trade Union Act 2016, and to mitigate the worst aspects of the gig economy. I hope that that makes it clear to the Scottish Labour Party and to Ms Lennon that any concerns about a race to the bottom would be ill founded were such powers to be vested in this Parliament. We want to use such powers to create a fairer economy.

Ms Lennon mentioned the upcoming election, to which we turn our attention. The Scottish Government will stand on its record—on what we have achieved—and on our ambitions for what more has to be done. The Scottish Government will continue to do all that we can, with the powers that we have, to deliver a fair, inclusive and green

recovery. However, we will also continue to campaign for more powers to enable us to do ever more.

I move amendment S5M-24263.2, to insert at end:

“, and that, to properly address these issues, the Scottish Parliament needs to have control over employment law.”

16:05

Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Con): Allow me to welcome Monica Lennon to her new role as her party's economy spokesperson.

No one would have thought that the final year of this parliamentary session would have been dominated by a global health emergency, but perhaps its final weeks could be focused on solving the economic emergency that it has caused. Of course, the fact that we can focus on recovery at all is down to the incredible work of the NHS and the British armed forces in rolling out the vaccine. In Scotland, more than 1.5 million people have been vaccinated so far. Across the UK, the figure is more than 20 million. The UK vaccination rate is simply astonishing, and it paves the way for the recovery that we are here to debate today.

The recovery will be particularly important for Scotland's young people, who have been hit especially hard by the economic crisis—a consequence of many of them working in hard-hit industries such as retail, hospitality and leisure. The young person's guarantee is a welcome move to help them, alongside the British Government's kickstart scheme, which is already creating jobs for young people—120,000 across the UK as a whole at the end of January. Sandy Begbie, in the report “Young Person Guarantee: No-one Left Behind”, recommends that the two schemes “complement each other”, and I whole-heartedly agree with Mr Begbie.

Ultimately, the best way to help people of all ages is to get the economy back on its feet. The first order of business in doing that is protecting jobs, and funding support has been crucial to such efforts. However, a year after the crisis began, many businesses continue to fall through the cracks. Just last week, I stood here calling for help for the wedding industry, the cleaning sector and supply-chain companies. They are asking for just enough to see them through the crisis. The food-and-drink wholesale sector, for example, needs more support because the original fund was just not enough. The trade body BACTA—the British Amusement Catering Trade Association—is asking for a £1.5 million discrete fund to help amusement supply companies across Scotland.

The resources are there—support is flowing into Scotland from the British Government to tackle the crisis—so why will the SNP not listen to those who

are crying out for help? Its reluctance to use the resources available to it has the public scratching their heads. The approach from the British Government has been critical in safeguarding jobs and livelihoods. Almost a million Scottish jobs have been saved, £20 billion has been spent on tackling the crisis and young people are finding work through the kickstart scheme, which is worth almost £4,000 for every unemployed young person in Scotland—more than double the SNP's own scheme.

Monica Lennon: I agree that there is a need for speed in getting the funding and support from Government out to the front line, but is it a matter of regret to Maurice Golden that the UK Government has been slow to give business certainty around furlough?

Statutory sick pay is a public health measure. Not having sick pay is putting people at risk. What will he and his colleagues do to ensure that more action is taken to sort out the sick-pay issue?

Maurice Golden: Furlough has been extended to September, there has been £407 billion of support for families, jobs and businesses throughout the crisis and, just today, an additional £1.2 billion in Barnett consequential has been announced for the Scottish Government. That is all to be welcomed. The VAT cut that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has announced will help tourism and hospitality. It has been extended, as has the freeze on spirit duty and, crucially, the furlough scheme, as I have said. There is also £27 million for the Aberdeen energy transition zone, £2 million for a North Sea transition deal and access to the £4.8 billion levelling up fund, to get direct UK Government investment in communities that the SNP chooses to ignore.

The British Government has succeeded in preventing an economic collapse in Scotland. It is now for this Parliament to start on Scotland's road out of lockdown and towards recovery. However, the First Minister's exit plan is extremely disappointing. There is no hope, no ambition and no certainty for the thousands of businesses that are hanging on by their fingertips.

The Scottish Conservatives have a plan. Swedish-style job security councils would match people who are out of work with new opportunities. Additional support for town centres would open up new business opportunities, boost active travel and improve access. A coronavirus business restrictions advisory council would bring business leaders together to advise on the necessary restrictions. Public procurement would be reformed, to favour local suppliers, protect local jobs and retain wealth in communities. A road map to recovery would focus on low-carbon projects such as decommissioning, district heating and electric arc furnaces.

Those are commonsense proposals for a green recovery, which is strengthened by today's UK budget. I hoped that other parties would suggest equally practical measures today. To be fair, there is much in Labour's motion with which we can agree. I mentioned the plight of young people and other disadvantaged groups. However, a detailed recovery proposal is missing. Also, the Labour motion asserts that we have an "exploitative, low-wage economy". In general terms, the reverse is true, although I agree that a high-wage, more highly skilled economy should be our aim.

The SNP amendment is the most disappointing. Instead of saying something—anything—about its plans for a green recovery, the SNP predictably demands more powers, although it has failed to use its powers time and time again, letting Scotland down. That is a sad confirmation of the SNP's true priority. It is a strange demand, given that the SNP has had to be dragged kicking and screaming to use the resources that it has. For example, the Scottish Conservatives had to force the SNP to extend rates relief to retail, hospitality and leisure businesses and the newspaper sector.

The public needs this Parliament to focus on them—their families and their communities. That is how we will get the recovery started. We stand ready to deliver.

I move amendment S5M-24263.1, to leave out "the exploitative, low-wage economy" and insert:

"Scottish Government support for workers, jobs and communities, including the development of a roadmap to recovery, the creation of job security councils, establishing a Coronavirus Business Restrictions Advisory Council and additional support for town centres; welcomes the UK Government's unprecedented support for Scotland's recovery;"

16:12

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I very much welcome the debate, and I echo the welcome that has been offered to Monica Lennon in her new role.

There is nothing in Monica Lennon's motion with which I disagree. Deep structural inequalities have, indeed, been exposed by the pandemic. This has been a terrible year for everyone, but it has been far, far worse for people who are on low or precarious incomes, people in precarious housing and people who cannot work from home, either because of their employers' attitudes or because of the nature of their homes.

People have faced issues to do with workplace autonomy. How much control do people have over the public health measures that need to be implemented in their workplaces? Do they really have a voice at work?

There is also historical underpayment of the kind of work—from social care to cleaning—that is critical to the wellbeing of us all.

Issues in retail and hospitality have been mentioned. Those issues are especially relevant to women workers. They are also relevant to younger workers, who are disproportionately represented in those sectors and endure discriminatory minimum-wage rates.

Those structural inequalities cause harm in their own right, but they have also been impacted by Covid. There are people who face low rates of statutory sick pay or no sick pay at all. There are people who do not have the confidence to enter self-isolation when they know that they need to, because they know that they will lose pay as a result. I have spoken to people on precarious contracts who are worried even about taking a test, for fear that they will lose pay if they are not able to work. It remains to be seen whether those structural inequalities will also be evident in roll-out of vaccination through lower take-up in marginalised communities.

The Government's amendment adds the issue of control over employment law. I cannot disagree with that. I was surprised only at how limited the Government's amendment was.

Only the Conservatives seem to disagree with the basic premise of the debate. I would vote against their amendment even if it would only add to the motion. The coronavirus restrictions business advisory council that they call for—yet again, that policy is reheated—would, as I have argued before, end up not as a body advising on how best to implement public health measures, but as a group lobbying against public health measures.

However, what the Conservative amendment would delete is far more extreme than what it would add. It would delete reference to the idea of our being a fair work nation. It would delete reference to support for groups that are marginalised in the economy and it would delete mention of a green economic recovery. It would delete even the mere acknowledgment that there are exploitation and low wages in our economy.

We should remember that we are living in an economy in which one of the richest people on the planet, sitting at the top of a company—Amazon—is a billionaire many times over as a result of tax avoidance and paying poverty wages. People who work in that organisation are paid poverty wages and are simply allowed to be exploited. Such a person becomes a billionaire not because he works hard, but by exploiting others. That is the structure of our economy.

The Green amendment, which was not selected for debate, sought to add other perspectives. It is

clear that the concept of everlasting growth on a finite planet is unsustainable. However, it is also clear that growth ideology has failed to achieve human wellbeing. Growth happens at times when the gap between the richest and the poorest continues to increase. The rhetoric about a green recovery, which is now heard right across the political spectrum, is increasingly common, but so often it is heard from the lips of those who also support the fossil-fuel industry, road building, aviation growth and all the failed approaches of the past. Essentially, they are still propping up an economy that rests on the waging of a war against nature.

I will finish by saying something about the historical context. As has been said, we, or most of us, want to avoid a return to austerity—to the idea that the burden of what we have come through should rest on the shoulders of those who have the least. At some point, reconciliation will have to be made and we will have to find a way to pay for what we have come through, but it must not be people who are in poverty who pay the bill.

However, that is about more than just the crash of a dozen or so years ago; we need to look at what happened before that. There were decades in which Governments handed over power—away from democratic accountability and on to the markets and the financial system. When those systems failed more than a dozen years ago, there was an opportunity to correct that historical error. The opportunity was not taken. Now, even deeper power is being accumulated in the age of big data, with all its capacity to manipulate people's behaviour and perceptions. The big players in surveillance capitalism have a kind of power that even those in finance capitalism never achieved.

Important policy questions therefore face us, including how to deliver and fund social care, and how to transition to a sustainable economy and do so fairly. However, the challenges that we face are not solely about those policy choices. Recovery from what ails us as a society must mean bringing power in our society back under democratic accountability. That is a far bigger challenge, and it is one that few Governments around the world are even attempting to address.

16:19

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I welcome Monica Lennon to her new role in the Scottish Labour Party and commend her for the fine challenge that she posed for Anas Sarwar. I know that we will be able to find common cause on many issues, just as our two parties have done in the past. In that spirit, we will support her motion today.

The Liberal Democrats want a needle-sharp focus on recovery from the pandemic. We will always put recovery first. Any distraction, such as another independence referendum, would let down the thousands and thousands of people who are desperate for work.

First, I will say a few words about today's UK budget. We support some of the measures, including the extension of the furlough scheme, the extension of self-employment support and the support for 600,000 more self-employed people—the excluded, for whom my colleague Jamie Stone MP has been leading the charge. We also support maintenance of the £20 uplift in universal credit.

I am disappointed with a few things in the budget, including the freezing of the personal income tax allowance from 2022 until 2026. The freeze will hit people who are on the lowest incomes hardest, and will bring more low-paid people into the scope of income tax. That was an issue that we in the Liberal Democrats successfully pursued in Government, so we are disappointed that it is being undermined now.

Most important of all, the budget does not match the scale of the challenge of recovery, in particular for the many small businesses that are on their knees right now, and the millions of people who are still excluded from support altogether.

The UK budget delivers £1.2 billion of normal consequentials, much of which is driven by the restart grants. There is also doubling of the resource borrowing limit to £600 million for the next three years. That will be helpful in my discussions with the Cabinet Secretary for Finance later today.

The Scottish Liberal Democrat economic plan focuses on skills and long-term career advice, new graduate placements with small businesses, new retraining grants for people who need them and enabling more employee and community ownership of businesses.

During the pandemic, serious costs are being borne by all in society, but they are being borne especially by young people. Our 24-point plan includes a myriad of measures that will stand by those people. We support a national accredited internship programme for graduates, which would include short-term bite-sized placements with Scotland's small and medium-sized enterprises.

We want to provide funding for a training bond, coupled to careers advice, that can be used to support people of all ages to pay for further skills development throughout their careers. It is important that support continues throughout a career, rather than there being shorter-term interventions, as is often the case.

We would expand the apprenticeship programme with colleges, universities and businesses to enable more young people to access places. It would target sectors including low carbon, care, education and artificial intelligence.

Reform of business rates is also required. We want to take the burden off high street retailers and allow them to compete with online rivals. We will encourage enterprise agencies to recognise the value, beyond traditional economic measures, of more diverse sectors, such as care and education.

We advance those measures and more in our 24-point plan. After years of division over referendums and the shock of the pandemic, the economic position in Scotland is fragile. Businesses need greater certainty to face the future, and workers need reassurances that they will not be allowed to fall through the cracks.

Unfortunately, even before the pandemic, the Scottish Government was not doing enough to ensure that everyone could get ahead in life. Scottish Liberal Democrats have long argued that the Government should be using its procurement powers to ensure fair wages and conditions throughout the supply chain.

We have also been critical of the Government's willingness to pay out millions in economic support to firms such as Amazon, while letting down small home-grown businesses here. Under our proposals, our high streets would be able to compete on a level playing field with online rivals.

If Scotland is to recover from the pandemic, we need to ensure that everyone has a chance to thrive. That means getting talented graduates into small businesses, ensuring that education and retraining are available for life and using the power of the Scottish Government to boost small business.

We must put recovery first.

16:25

Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP): I have a number of observations to make. At the outset, I make the perhaps obvious point that we are not yet out of the woods as far as the coronavirus pandemic is concerned. Although there are some green shoots of hope, there are still many obstacles to be overcome, so a cautious approach to easing restrictions is still to be encouraged with a view to ensuring that any further steps forward are not followed by any further lockdowns in the months ahead. That view is shared by many of my Cowdenbeath constituents who are in contact with me, and I am sure that it is also a view that has been expressed

by many people across Scotland to their respective MSPs.

It is self-evident that, in the newly elected Parliament after 6 May, we will still be dealing with the pandemic and will need to deploy our resources accordingly. At the same time, there will be a need to deal with the challenges that the pandemic has presented across all aspects of our society, including our health service, economy, general wellbeing and confidence, and we will need to determine how best such challenges should be met and what structural changes will be required to do so successfully.

The second observation that I make concerns the vital importance of ensuring that no young people are left behind as a result of the pandemic. In that regard, I am of the view that the SNP Scottish Government's young persons guarantee will play a pivotal role. Since November last year, we have seen the positive impact that that excellent initiative has had, with the creation of around 18,000 job, training and education opportunities for people aged between 18 and 24. As far as job opportunities are concerned, I have stressed the importance on a number of occasions in previous debates and statements of ensuring that, when we talk about job opportunities, we are talking about serious stable employment with job progression built in.

As far as younger people and schoolchildren are concerned, it will be vital to ensure that their education is not subject to any permanent damage as a result of the pandemic, so I welcome the additional funding that has been made available by the SNP Scottish Government to deal with such matters and to continue the important on-going work to close the attainment gap. That is a very real issue for some children in my Cowdenbeath constituency and one that is entirely unacceptable.

My third observation concerns the need for a push to see sustainable jobs being created with fair work principles becoming the norm in every workplace. I am aware that, since March last year, the Scottish Government has committed considerable funding to supporting economic recovery, including a £230 million economic recovery stimulus package to invest in capital projects and many other projects, including green projects. At the same time, all the excellent fair work initiatives that have been rolled out in recent years have made, and are continuing to make, a real difference in the workplace.

However, there are two elephants in the room that limit the progress that we can make. First, the lack of the key economic levers that every independent country takes for granted, including appropriate borrowing powers, and, secondly, the lack of power over employment law, including over wages. On both counts, it remains a mystery to

me why the Labour Party in Scotland has consistently opposed those powers coming to this Parliament and instead seems to prefer Tory rule, rather than home rule, over our economy and our employment law, which is to the detriment of workers in Scotland.

I take the opportunity to welcome Anas Sarwar to his new role and to congratulate Monica Lennon on a very impressive result in Labour's internal contest. However, I remain confused about their position on employment law. It is not clear whether what they are saying today is an agreed party policy. Is Monica Lennon speaking about all employment powers or only about some? I look forward to clarification on that in the winding-up speech.

Labour members continue to set their faces against the Parliament having the economic levers that are necessary to do the job. As I said, those are powers that every normal independent country takes for granted. It is only with independence that we will be able to unlock our potential. Independence will put Scotland's future in Scotland's hands.

The Presiding Officer: Before I call our next speaker, I draw members' attention to the fact that we have a substantial number of members standing down at the election and a diminishing number of debates between now and the election recess. We can expect to see an increasing number of colleagues taking advantage of opportunities to make what may be their valedictory remarks or to thank people.

I say that to highlight the fact that my fellow Presiding Officers and I will exercise a degree of latitude if members in that situation digress slightly from the motion in hand.

Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): Hear, hear.

The Presiding Officer: We have a few such members here this afternoon, Mr Lyle. The first of those is David Stewart.

16:32

David Stewart (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I, too, congratulate my friend Anas Sarwar on his recent election as Labour leader. I wish him well for the future. He will be part of Scotland's recovery. I also welcome and congratulate Monica Lennon on her new role. I have worked closely with her on health and sport and I know the fantastic contribution that she made to that brief. I wish her the best for the future.

I will speak about Scotland's recovery through a Highlands and Islands lens. As the Presiding Officer hinted, this will be my final speech in Parliament after 14 years of service as a member.

Some members will react with relief at that news, but I have a sense of sadness, humility and pride. I feel sadness, because parting is such sweet sorrow. I feel a sense of loss about leaving the best job in Scotland, in which I have represented my home and birthplace in the Highlands and Islands. I feel humility, because I have respect and admiration for the great architects of the Parliament and the personalities who moulded its character.

Donald Dewar was a visionary with a wicked sense of humour and an appetite that seemed to defy nature and indeed gravity. Jim Wallace was one of the great understated players in the foundation of devolution. There was the class of '99—the original members and excellent officials, who were led at the time by Paul Grice.

There were personalities. Margo MacDonald is greatly missed and widely admired. She was a person who could start a party in an empty room. What can I say about Stewart Stevenson? That he is a veteran of the Boer war or the inventor of the wheel? That he discovered penicillin? Perhaps not, but he had me convinced. Jack McConnell was a man of action and ideas, who really understood rural disadvantage. I put on record his support for the University of the Highlands and Islands. The Scottish Government's job relocation to rural areas was particularly welcome.

I feel pride in this Parliament and in devolution, which is a process and not an event, as Donald Dewar wisely said. Devolution is just a shade younger than my daughter, Kirsty. What they have in common is that they both grew stronger through conflict, experience and rebellion.

The landscape has changed substantially since my first election victory as a fresh-faced councillor in Nithsdale district in Dumfries in 1984—believe it or not—but one aspect that has not changed is teamwork. I thank my wife, Linda, my son, Andrew, and my daughter, Kirsty, for their unwavering support. I thank all my Labour colleagues, particularly those who are here today, and excellent party members over the years, particularly Peter Peacock and Rhoda Grant for their support and for putting up with my bad jokes. I thank all my office staff: Olivia, Donna, Gemma, Chris, John, Laura and Dell—who are led brilliantly by Andrene Maxwell—as well as researcher Kate Fry in Edinburgh, for being a great team.

Believe it or not, I also thank MSPs of all parties. I might not agree with all of you all the time, but I recognise wise contributions when I hear them. I thank the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body staff, who are ably led by David McGill—security, clerks and the Scottish Parliament information centre staff. I recognise the invaluable work of those who, over the years, have cleaned the building and served our food.

Before I conclude, I will touch on Scotland's recovery, particularly within the Highlands and Islands. Before I joined Parliament in 2007, I worked for the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations and was privileged to meet hundreds of people in the voluntary sector throughout rural Scotland. The work that they do—some of it paid and some of it unpaid—is the very lifeblood of the Highlands and Islands. It delivers services locally and builds the social capital that contains and sustains real rural communities. That does not happen by accident; it is not an inevitable by-product of economic success. The work that those people do in their communities needs to be recognised, valued and, more importantly, given funding to make it sustainable.

Of course, some will ask what the Labour Party ever did to help recovery in rural areas. I take them back to the 1940s, when Tom Johnston, the Labour Secretary of State for Scotland, nationalised hydro power, thereby giving electricity to poor Highlanders for the first time. I take them back to 1965, when Willie Ross, the Labour Secretary of State for Scotland, created the Highlands and Islands Development Board and turned around a massive population decline in the Highlands and Islands. I take them back to 1999, when Tony Blair created the first national minimum wage. It was my privilege to vote for that legislation as a Highland MP. The votes continued all night, and I left Westminster at 9 am. As I crossed Westminster Bridge, heading for my Waterloo flat, I confess that I was happy, although not in a self-serving, party-political way; I was glad to protect the waiters in Fort William, the bar staff in Galashiels and the security guards in Inverness.

We all know the rural development challenges in the Highlands and Islands and beyond, such as distance, remoteness, low population density, lack of access to services and low gross domestic product. My great personal concern is the loss of young people from remote and island communities. However, there are great opportunities for renewal and recovery. It is better to light one candle than to forever curse the darkness. Let us build on the competitive advantage of the culture and the environment. Yes, the hills and glens are important but so is the character of the people.

Rural development needs the intelligence and individuality of the people; we need to develop life sciences, create green jobs in green ports, build clusters of renewables, stimulate research and development in areas such as spaceports, and link industry with universities such as the University of the Highlands and Islands.

I have a great love of American political and military history and, maybe soon, I will have more time to read all the books that are gathering dust

on my bookshelf at home. The other day, I read the valedictory speech of General MacArthur at West Point. He referred to a 1920s American ballad that said:

“Old soldiers never die, they just fade away”.

In a few short weeks, my parliamentary political career will come to an end, and the torch will be passed to a younger generation. Perhaps veteran politicians never die, they just fade away—a Highlander who loved his job and tried to do his duty. [*Applause.*]

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Stewart. On behalf of all your fellow parliamentarians, I thank you for all that you have contributed, including to the corporate body, for which very few people give you as much credit as you deserve.

16:39

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): What a lovely speech from Dave Stewart—I wish him all the best. I see him as a very good example of the character of the people he represents.

I turn to the motion. The next parliamentary session must focus on rebuilding the economy for all of Scotland after Covid-19, and I am glad to support that fulsomely. However, in our economic recovery from Covid, we must never lose sight of the fact that the pandemic—as much of a global emergency as it is—is dwarfed by the nature of the climate and biodiversity emergencies when it comes to the overall potential threat to human life and our economic prospects in the longer term. If our recovery is too knee-jerk and in the interests of short-term fixes, we might inadvertently regress from our progress in driving down emissions and, as a result, create worse outcomes for people’s futures. We should never lose sight of that.

Carbon emissions pose a longer-term threat to human and animal life. If we fail to address those emissions, we will miss the opportunity to lead internationally in low-carbon technologies and the creation of sustainable jobs for future generations that are not hung on the sometimes shoochy peg of geopolitics or fluctuating oil prices. Front-loading investment in emerging innovations and technologies is essential. Ideally, we would do that by borrowing the substantial funds that that ambition deserves—an action that is completely in line with my party’s constitutional ambitions.

The next part of the motion talks about

“the structural inequalities that the pandemic has exposed in society”.

It is a fact that women have been disproportionately shouldering the caring and schooling burden and are more likely to have lost their income. Last month, I led a members’

business debate on that issue, with a fuller investigation into it.

The motion says that

“the green economic recovery must be people-centred”.

In my area, and particularly in the north-east, a just transition with a focus on human rights, including the right to continued and fair work, is central to my hopes for a green recovery. Our plans for a low-carbon future must take rurality, poverty, disability, age and current sectoral economic dependence into account. Young people deserve a sustainable future, but older workers must never be put on a scrap heap as we transition.

The motion mentions

“opportunities that have been continually missed”.

I was interested to hear what opportunities that are currently open to the Scottish Government Labour members think have been missed. On procurement, which I think I heard mentioned, I agree. However, as Sandra White said, our view is that employment law should be in our hands so that we can address exploitative work and, I would add, some stubborn causes of the gender pay gap.

My problem is that addressing those inequalities in the workplace has not been a priority of any Tory Government—the Governments that have been in charge of such things. We have had Tory Governments in place for nearly 70 per cent of my lifetime—members can do the maths. They care little for workers’ rights and look set to roll back existing ones as a result of European Union exit, so forgive me if I do not hold out any hope that Maurice Golden’s election pitch today will change that.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge the work that my party colleagues Sandra White and Richard Lyle have done on workers’ rights over the years. They are speaking in the chamber for the last time today, and I thank them both for standing up for Scotland in absolutely everything that they have done.

I agree with the motion’s call

“for urgent action to make Scotland a Fair Work Nation”.

We should all be keen to explore what more can be done to make Government agency support dependent on evidence of fair work practices, and I agree that public procurement should follow the same principles, but everything that affects workers’ rights should be our decision. Members here should scrutinise such decisions and legislate for them in this Parliament.

I want a gender pay gap reporting duty that covers all companies with more than 100

employees and that compels those with a sizeable gap to put together an urgent action plan to address it; I want an end to a legal difference in minimum hourly pay for young people who do the same work as older people; I want meaningful mechanisms to address racial and gender segregation in sectors; and I want a social security system that addresses poverty rather than drives people into it.

The motion mentions

“further support for businesses and sectors hit hardest”.

That is fundamental, but, as I said, I want us to be in charge of how we finance that. I note that some union flag-embossed love bombing is proposed. Those behind that proposal need to recognise that they are fooling no one with such pathetic, ill-thought-through and patronising plans. They are pathetic because they are token and cynical gestures that have no engagement with Scots other than the Scottish Tory yes-men MPs. They are cynical and patronising because they are for headline generation only and assume that Scottish citizens are naive enough to be convinced by them. They are ill-thought-out because they refuse to recognise that Scotland’s Parliament, public agencies, citizens and sectors are the best people to decide where money is spent—not a Prime Minister in London who cannot even bring himself to speak to ordinary people in Scottish streets when he comes here for his annual visit to some highly managed press junket at a military base or a Tory-supporting business.

A Scotland that can fully recover, with the climate, our prosperity and fair work at its heart is a Scotland that is in full control of all its decisions.

16:45

Rachael Hamilton (Etrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): I wish outgoing members who are delivering their last speeches all the very best. I also thank the Labour Party for giving us the opportunity to debate the Covid recovery. The motion in Monica Lennon’s name seeks to address key points that the Scottish Government should adopt.

The Scottish Fiscal Commission forecasts that Scotland’s economy will not return to pre-pandemic levels until 2024 at the earliest. Societal inequalities exposed by the pandemic have been exacerbated, and we must ensure that the next Government that is elected to Scotland addresses them with a strong recovery and support plan.

Scotland’s other Government has delivered billions to the Scottish budget to support the most vulnerable, as well as an extension to furlough until the end of September. In her new role, Monica Lennon will no doubt welcome two further

grants for the self-employed. I am grateful to the chancellor for responding to Scottish Conservative calls for an extension to the £20 uplift to universal credit for another six months so that the most vulnerable in our society receive support.

I want to highlight three groups of people who are negatively impacted by the pandemic: women, young people and people with disabilities.

We must prioritise the disability employment gap as part of the recovery. The latest annual statistics show that, in Scotland, the difference in employment rates stands at a staggering 35.5 per cent, with 81.1 per cent of non-disabled people employed compared with 45.6 per cent of disabled people. That will have changed during the past 12 months, given the pandemic. People living with disabilities have been adversely affected by Covid. A United Kingdom survey of 6,000 people by Citizens Advice found that disabled people were at twice the risk of redundancy as non-disabled employees, with one in four disabled people surveyed facing redundancy. Inclusion Scotland’s chief executive officer, Sally Wither, highlighted that and said:

“The Covid-19 crisis and responses to it highlighted this, aggravating existing inequalities and generating new ones, and putting the human rights of disabled people at further risk.”

That leads me on to the fair start Scotland scheme. The SNP was lagging behind in helping people who were already unemployed before the pandemic. The scheme has been slow off the mark to help people who are in greatest need of employment, including those with health conditions, single parents and those with caring responsibilities or who have additional needs or disabilities.

The £96 million flagship SNP scheme has failed nine out of 10 people. Statistics show that only one fifth of people managed to stay in the job for 13 weeks, while 40 per cent of those referred did not even start on the programme.

For many young people, it has been difficult leaving school or higher education to go into a world where jobs are few and far between. In fact, the number of young people claiming unemployment-related benefits across the UK increased by 122 per cent between March and July last year.

Thanks to UK Government intervention schemes that are available to young people, such as the kick-start scheme, we can see some green shoots. Furthermore, the Scottish Conservatives highlighted the need for a laser-like focus on ensuring that young people reach positive destinations, with apprenticeships and an education guarantee to age 19. With those measures and a fair start scheme and a young

person's guarantee that actually delivered, there could be far more opportunities for young people.

The Covid pandemic has had a disproportionate effect on women, from employment to financial security. As was mentioned in Gillian Martin's recent members' business debate, the Institute for Fiscal Studies has estimated that women are a third more likely to be employed in sectors that were shut down in the first national lockdown and women are at higher risk of job losses. Of course, job losses also have an impact on children. To our shame, almost a quarter of children in Scotland live in poverty. According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the Scottish Government will miss its child poverty targets.

I welcome Monica Lennon's comments on the impact on women, but, under the Labour UK Government—we have to be honest here—there was a 25 per cent increase in unemployment among women. It took the Conservative Government to reduce the UK's gender pay gap from 27.5 per cent to 17.3 per cent in 2019. It was not a Labour Government that did that.

As we emerge from the pandemic, we must see strong economic growth and more opportunities for young women to start apprenticeships or retrain for the jobs of the future in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. The Scottish Conservatives want to see job security councils set up to work with employers to develop recovery strategies for jobs.

Presiding Officer, I am sure that I have run out of time. I urge members to support the Conservative amendment tonight so that we can ensure that we can work for a recovery together.

15:31

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): I do not know whether that was Rachael Hamilton's final speech, but I wish her well in her future career, whatever that might be.

There is certainly a lot that I would agree with in the motion. We face a lot of challenges as we move forward out of Covid, but I also think that we can do so with hope and optimism. One of the themes in the motion is clearly low wages, fair work, poorer work outcomes, and precarious and low paid work, and I would like to focus on that area to start with.

There are a number of ways in which we need to tackle those things, and I might as well start with the statutory minimum wage. I believe that that is a key—if not the key—driver in all of this. Ultimately, only when all employers are forced to pay a wage that all their staff can live on will we really make progress. Many employers are decent and want to pay a decent wage, but there will

always be some that do not, so a legal requirement is needed.

As we know, the statutory minimum wage is set at Westminster. Ideally, it would raise the wage by a considerable amount, but one option is for the power to do that to be devolved, and I hope that Labour would support that. Of course, some in the business community would complain that they were having to compete with a lower-wage economy in England, but surely that would be better than being dragged down by the system south of the border.

We already know that we do not want to—and, in fact, cannot—compete with low-wage economies around the world. Scotland should be focusing on high-value products, be they in food and drink, engineering or tourism, such that customers pay a higher price and staff get proper pay.

It is true that, even without statutory powers in the area, we can influence pay levels in Scotland to some extent. We are yet to see whether we have more flexibility now that we are out of the EU. However, I note as an example that, when local authorities and the public sector in general procure goods and services, it must be done on the basis not of lowest cost, but of best value. Most of us know that, often, buying the cheapest food or the cheapest car does not represent a saving in the long run.

We also need to accept that there may be a political price to pay for that approach and that it may not always be popular. For example, if we have £1 million to spend on new housing, should we go for 10 homes at £100,000, with some of the workers being paid badly and treated poorly, or should we go for nine homes at £110,000 with all the workers being paid and treated well? We need to be honest about those trade-offs and balances. In the long run, the economy and all of us will benefit from higher wages and fairer conditions, but in the short run we may need to choose between more housing and better-paid workers.

There is also a place for the individual consumer in all of this. Of course, someone who is on a low wage and is struggling with finances is going to have to buy the cheapest food and clothes. That point was made at yesterday's time for reflection by Mia Fallon and Nathaniel Sweeney from St Aidan's high school in Wishaw, who had sought to live on £2 a day for food. However, if people's pay increases, more people can start to have a choice. Many of us already have a choice, and we should be thinking about the choices that we make.

We have seen that with the success of the fair trade movement—I note that it is fair trade fortnight. Do we buy Fairtrade coffee and wine, to mention but two products that I like? They might

be a bit more expensive because they are fairly traded, but we know that the terms and conditions of the workers will be fairer.

As a slight aside, I understand that the UK consumes something like £4 billion-worth of chocolate per annum and that 60 per cent of the cocoa used for it comes from West Africa, where some of the workers earn only 74p a day. I got my researcher to check that, and it is 74p a day. Even £2 per day would allow them to afford enough food, children's education and healthcare. I therefore hope that the recovery will not stop at Scotland's shores but that we will all learn to think about it more globally. My point is that some people are prepared to pay a bit more and that it is even better when an organisation or a town does that. The Parliament, for example, uses only Fairtrade coffee nowadays, which is certainly a step in the right direction.

Our responsibilities to choose should not stop with fair trade. Closer to home, do we deliberately buy Scottish meat, potatoes and beer whenever we can? Yes, it might be a bit more expensive, but we know that it is creating jobs in this country and boosting our economy. Further, what about holidays, if and when they are allowed again? Will we all spend at least one break each year in Scotland, again creating jobs and boosting the economy? My point here is that we all have a bit of responsibility in this recovery: Westminster does, Holyrood does and individuals do as well.

As I said at the beginning, we clearly face challenges, but we can have hope as we move forward. The Scottish National Investment Bank is just finding its feet, but we need to keep it focused on equality and fairness, making sure that businesses led by women or disabled people get their fair share of investment. It was broadly accepted that Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise had not always concentrated enough on those equality aspects of investments in past years. We therefore need to be sure, going forward, that limited public money is used to the best effect. Inclusion Scotland made the point in its briefing for today's debate that Covid has had a disproportionate effect on disabled people, so that needs to be different going forward.

Training and skills will be important, too. School pupils and college and university students have all missed out on parts of their courses. Again, we need to focus on upskilling and lifelong learning in the years ahead. As the Open University points out in its briefing, 75 per cent of OU students are working full time or part time, so there are good models there and I hope that we can do things better. Yes, there are challenges ahead and, yes, it will not all be plain sailing, but I believe that we

can be positive and that Scotland can achieve a great deal.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Lewis Macdonald, to be followed by Sandra White. I understand, Mr Macdonald, that this is your last speech, too.

16:57

Lewis Macdonald (North East Scotland) (Lab): Indeed it is, Presiding Officer, and I thank you very much for the invitation to speak this afternoon.

I, too, congratulate my colleagues Anas Sarwar and Monica Lennon on taking up their new roles this week, and I congratulate David Stewart on his valedictory speech today. I am one of the class of '99 to whom Mr Stewart referred and one of those fortunate enough to have worked with Donald Dewar both before and after the creation of the Scottish Parliament. As you have said, Presiding Officer, I am also one of those not seeking re-election this year. Like others, I look back on my 22 years in this Parliament with both humility and pride, with a sense of achievement and with a recognition of the privilege that it has been to serve in the birth and growth of a modern democratic Parliament in this fantastic country. I look back with a recognition, too, of the challenge facing our successors in steering the recovery in the years ahead.

Recovery, as we have heard, is about getting the economy up and running again, and doing it in a way that is fairer and fitter for the future than it has been in the past. Recovery in 2021 is also about health for those who have been ill and are fighting to get back to full physical fitness, as well as for those whose mental health and wellbeing have been affected by social isolation or bereavement, the loss of a job or fear for the future. The Covid pandemic has shown more starkly than anything in living memory just how the health of the individual and the health of the community are intimately linked, and that is how we should view recovery, too.

What is good for each of us is good for us all. Protecting the most vulnerable individual in our family or neighbourhood has been a driver for collective action and sacrifice over the past 12 months, and we will achieve a full recovery only if we take the same approach. To deal with a global pandemic, we have needed to understand how the virus works, to find out who is most at risk, to test and trace those who are infected and to vaccinate whole populations to keep everybody safe. Government action has been required at every level, from global to local, and co-operation has been key.

To restart the economy after Covid, we will need to take the same approach. We will need to understand the challenge, identify those most at risk, monitor impacts and take actions to avert disaster for individuals and whole communities. Just as we have needed Government action at every level and international co-operation to fight Covid, we will need the same to meet the economic challenges ahead.

There can be no recovery in one country, and there can be no recovery without harnessing the collective efforts of all concerned. When the worst of the pandemic has passed, people will not expect Governments to go back to business as usual or to repeat the mistakes of the recent past; people will expect Governments to prepare for the next pandemic, even if the current pandemic is under control. They will expect ministers, for example, to revisit exercise Iris, which tried to predict what it would take to tackle a severe acute respiratory syndrome epidemic, to see what more we need to do.

So, too, with economic recovery. There have been plenty of warning signs over the past 10 years that all has not been well with our economic health. The gig economy, bogus self-employment, zero-hours contracts, a disadvantaged younger generation, and racial and gender inequality in jobs were all issues long before the coronavirus crisis hit home a year ago. All of them have been exacerbated by the impacts of the pandemic. The people who were most vulnerable before have been the people most at risk of losing their jobs or of being exploited by unscrupulous employers, as we have heard only this week. They are the most at risk of long-term loss of income or job security, along with the younger generation entering the jobs market now or in the next few years.

The focus of Government at every level cannot simply be on restarting economic growth on the basis that, somehow, prosperity for some will trickle down to create precarious employment for others. There must also be a focus on ensuring that activity is even across the economy and across all income groups and generations, so that those who have been hardest hit by the pandemic are not left behind by the recovery.

Government support for a just transition in energy production and consumption will be vital for the North East Scotland region, which I have been privileged to represent, and for the country as a whole. There must be no switching off jobs and livelihoods in oil and gas in the way that there was in coal and steel a generation ago. The last thing that we need is another generation of energy workers thrown on the scrap heap because of decisions over which they have no control. However, transition there must be—and that must mean investment in new technologies of energy

production, carbon capture and storage, and the conversion of energy-intensive industries, heat and transport to be part of a net zero carbon future. It means investing in better railways, not in more new roads.

Today's debate has been about the focus of policy over the next session of the Scottish Parliament, which is what the next election will be all about. However, in closing, I must offer a slightly longer-term perspective.

It is over 40 years since I first campaigned for Scottish devolution and for a Labour Government. My children are much the same age now as I was then, and the issues that we are debating today will decide the kind of country and the kind of world in which they will live and work over the next 40 years. I am grateful to all those whose support has allowed me to take part in the debates and decisions of the Parliament since 1999: my party, my colleagues, my staff past and present, my family—above all, my wife Sandra and our daughters Sophie and Iona—and, of course, the voters of Aberdeen and the north-east.

Looking to the debates and decisions that lie ahead, I can say in all sincerity that I am greatly enthused by the talents and energy of the next generation. I wish all those who will take responsibility for those decisions the very best of luck. [*Applause.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: As a 99er myself, I am going to miss you. That is supposing that I get re-elected, of course. However, we are continuing as Deputy Presiding Officers, and we have a lot of fun offstage. We will not tell members about that—sorry.

Members: Oh!

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No—not together. That came out all wrong, as usual. I will be writing to Mrs Macdonald to explain that, Lewis. I wish that I had not said that.

I call Sandra White. Is this your last speech, Ms White, or have you not been told? I need to know.

17:04

Sandra White (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): It is my last speech. As far as I know, I do not have any other speeches.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You can have another go later. Just say that this is your penultimate speech, if you like.

Sandra White: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

I pay tribute to everyone who has spoken in the debate—such as my colleagues David Stewart and Lewis Macdonald—and everyone who will speak after me. The speeches have been

absolutely fantastic. As someone who has been here since 1999, and who was previously a councillor for 10 years in that lovely place that George Adam talks about, Paisley, I thought that it was about time that I gave over to younger people who can take up the cudgels for me.

I congratulate Anas Sarwar on his new position, and Monica Lennon also. When we came into the Parliament in 1999, we were all new starts and did not know what to expect or what would happen. There was a camaraderie then, simply because we had to rely on one another. I will leave it at that and not mention what is happening now or whether the same camaraderie is still there. However, we do get on with others.

David Stewart mentioned Margo MacDonald. Obviously, I remember Margo MacDonald, too, in the bar at Holyrood, although in 1999 we did not have a bar—it was more Deacon Brodie’s and places like that up at the top of the High Street, where there was an entirely different atmosphere. Maybe what gave us the camaraderie was that we went outside and met the public. I remember the talents of David McLetchie and Annabel Goldie, who are no longer here, although Annabel Goldie, while not in Parliament, is still in Bishopton. I remember Alison McInnes, who was a thoroughly decent lady from the Lib Dems, and Mary Scanlon, too. There were lots of people there—Elaine Smith is still here—and although we all had different aspirations, we all wanted to grow the Parliament for the people who had elected us.

I will turn to the motion in a couple of minutes, but before I do, I want to thank everyone—comrades who are here and those who are no longer with us, for example Kay Ullrich. I thank the committee clerks and the people who work in the Parliament, from the security staff to the cleaners and catering staff, who have made it a joy to come in every morning. They have been fantastic—they have really welcomed us and worked so hard to bring us the people’s Parliament.

I congratulate Monica Lennon on the motion. There is nothing in it that I could argue about, although I will no doubt argue about something. The motion talks about transforming

“the exploitative, low-wage economy”

and mentions

“disabled workers, ethnic minorities, women and young workers”.

It asks for the incorporation of “community wealth building opportunities” and talks about

“wellbeing and prosperity for individuals, businesses and communities across the whole of Scotland.”

Those might have been the things that brought me into politics all those years ago. I have always believed in giving people opportunities, particularly

the most vulnerable people. It will come as no surprise that, from an early age—my teens, in fact—I believed that the only way that we could do that was through independence and full powers for Scotland. I have always believed that and will continue to believe it. Speaking to members of the public in my constituency, Glasgow Kelvin, or outwith it, I think that it is coming, for a’ that, to use the phrase. It is certainly not long off. That is why, when I came into this Parliament, I had to push for that. Obviously, it is why I joined the SNP.

That is also why I welcome being able to contribute to the debate. It is incumbent on us all to ensure that, for the people who we represent, we do it to the best of our ability. I have a very mixed constituency in Glasgow Kelvin. As members know, there is a pretty well-off area, while other areas are pretty vulnerable. We have to make sure that we represent everyone, and it is my great belief that the only way that we can raise the levels of wellbeing and prosperity of those people as individuals and of the country is by gaining independence and having the same full fiscal powers as any other country. I believe that that is coming.

For many years, we, in the Parliament, have been working with one hand tied behind our back. Westminster withholds investment and blocks devolution and fiscal powers. I know that Anas Sarwar and I do not agree about what is normality, but for the life of me, I cannot see how it can be normal for a country of just under 6 million people to have to wait for a country of more than 60 million people to tell it what it can do. That is not normal, and we need those powers.

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance has repeatedly asked for those levers. In fact, a paper that was produced last year on the UK’s fiscal path set out 10 priorities that the Scottish Government believes the UK Government should follow to bring us out of austerity. It is a sensible route, and some of it has been followed. I think that it was mentioned earlier today in the budget. However, not all of it was followed. We are not even being listened to. How can we be treated as a grown-up country when we are not being listened to?

The pandemic has laid bare massive problems, but we are still working under the limitations of the fiscal framework that we have just spoken about. The additional funding from the UK Government has been welcome but I say this all the time, as do others, and I say it to Mr Golden and the other Tories: it is not a gift from Westminster. It is our money. It is our taxes. It is also about time that that got through.

We have been dragged out of the European Union, which is another example of something that Scotland did not vote for when England did. How can that be normal? What really frightens me—

Lewis Macdonald talked about this, too—is how being pulled out of the EU affects younger people. I certainly wanted to remain, for my granddaughter and everyone else. We have been pulled out of the EU and are being driven by a right-wing-thinking Tory cabal, and Tory ego, who line the pockets of their donors by—this has been proven—unlawfully awarding contracts to their acquaintances. I do not want to be part of a country that has a Government that does that.

When we talk about the economy and so on, the Tories are unfortunately pushing austerity. I hate to say it, even though it is true, but the Labour Party leader in Westminster is also pushing austerity.

I will not stand here and say that we cannot have independence. The people of Scotland and the people of England will never achieve what Monica Lennon describes in her motion—I appreciate it and believe everything that it says—as long as there is a Tory Government down there. Scotland will have to wait and carry on being tied to the strings of the Westminster Government. That cannot be right.

Thank you, Presiding Officer, for giving me extra time. I look forward to coming here again and perhaps we can get a wee drink at the bar with our friends.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: If that is an invitation and you are paying for us all, we will accept.

17:13

Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): First, I add my welcome to Monica Lennon as the new economy spokesperson for Labour and, before he leaves the chamber, I congratulate Anas Sarwar on being elected leader of the Scottish Labour Party. I also congratulate those who have made what could be their final speeches—David Stewart, Lewis Macdonald and Sandra White. I wish them all the very best for the future.

In his opening remarks, Maurice Golden was absolutely right to highlight the importance of the policy response across the UK to rebuild Scotland's economy. Today, I want to cover three different policy responses: the unprecedented policy response from the British Government; what we have seen from the SNP; and how things could and should be done differently here, in Scotland.

First, when it comes to the policy response from the British Government, there is no doubt that the historic measures that we have seen from the Chancellor of the Exchequer over the past year will lay the foundations for Scotland's recovery. More than 1 million jobs in Scotland and more than 1 million livelihoods have been saved,

100,000 local firms have been saved and an extra £13.3 billion of funding has been delivered to Scotland.

I will not go into the detail of what the Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland figures show, as Sandra White discussed that in some detail, but they show that Scotland benefits from fiscal transfer from the rest of the UK that is worth at least £2,000 per person in Scotland. That is according to the numbers that are produced by the Scottish Government.

Sandra White: When we talk about GERS, fiscal autonomy and so on, the GERS figures are based on belonging to the UK. They do not take into account Scotland being independent and what we could do then. That seems to go under the radar, but it should be at the top. GERS is not a true statement of what Scotland's fiscal costs are.

Dean Lockhart: I have to disagree. The GERS numbers, prepared by the Scottish Government, show exactly the revenue from Scotland and spending in Scotland in terms of both Scottish and UK Government spending, and they show a significant fiscal transfer from the rest of the UK to Scotland. Those are not my numbers; they are produced by the Scottish Government, but that is a debate for another day.

Earlier today, further measures were announced by the chancellor to help to rebuild Scotland's recovery, covering many of the matters raised by the Labour motion: the extension of the furlough scheme through to September, saving millions of jobs and livelihoods; extending the universal credit uplift and working tax credits; increasing the national living wage; and delivering a massive increase in green investment in Scotland. Therefore, while Labour talks the talk on rebuilding Scotland after the pandemic, Rishi Sunak walks the walk again and has delivered big time for Scotland.

It is important to recognise that we are now in a position to talk about emerging from the pandemic only as a result of the world's most successful vaccination programme, funded, researched and developed by the British Government and, as Maurice Golden said, successfully rolled out by the incredible work of the NHS and the British armed forces here in Scotland. It also has to be said that the vaccination programme was developed in the face of opposition from every other party in the chamber, who wanted and demanded that we join the EU vaccination programme. That decision would have delivered vaccines to only 8 per cent of Scotland's population, not the 32 per cent that we have vaccinated under the UK-wide programme. The British Government deserves a huge amount of recognition for delivering that real and fundamental road map to recovery.

I turn to contributions from the SNP benches. I genuinely think that they reflect a lack of coherent policy response to rebuilding Scotland's economy. We have just heard about a proliferation of confusing and difficult-to-access funds that were set up to distribute money from the chancellor. That funding is not getting out to the firms and people in need. The digital boost fund closed within five hours of opening, leaving hundreds of firms without any assistance. The Scottish National Investment Bank, which was mentioned by some SNP members as the great hope of the Administration, was allocated a budget of £250 million this year, but to date only £23 million has been invested at the height of an economic crisis. Less than 5 per cent of the budget of the SNIB has gone out to the people in need.

What about Benny Higgins's report into Scotland's recovery, which was debated in the chamber last June but has disappeared without trace? At the time, the Fraser of Allander institute warned:

"Without a focus on practical next steps, the risk is that this report is consigned to the shelf",

which is exactly what has happened.

As Rachael Hamilton pointed out, when it comes to plans for moving out of lockdown, the First Minister's exit plan has been extremely disappointing. There is no hope, no ambition and no certainty for the thousands of businesses across Scotland that are on their last legs, about to collapse—no detailed road map about when they can open up.

In his opening remarks, the minister referred to the creation of a wellbeing economy. However, as I explained earlier, Scotland has declined from 16th place to 21st place in international wellbeing rankings. I make the point to the minister that, in comparison with levels in other countries, in Scotland there have been relative declines in education, health and education, all of which are areas in which the SNP has had powers for 14 years. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No—the member is in his last minute. I was being generous only to the members who are making their final speeches. As far as I know, this is not Mr Lockhart's final speech. *[Laughter.]*

Dean Lockhart: As far as you know, Presiding Officer.

I turn to the motion that is before us. I will make this brief. It was remarkable to see the SNP's response to the Labour motion, which agrees that, after 14 years of SNP Government, Scotland has become a "low-wage economy". Its amendment seems to indicate that control over employment law is the only solution that would address that,

when the solution—the drivers to deliver highly paid, secure jobs—have always been within the control of the SNP. I refer to control over education and skills, training and apprenticeships, economic development, college and university funding, all of which have been cut, and over the creation of jobs in the high-tech digital and renewable sectors, all of which we have not seen.

We need a Government that is fully focused on building back from the pandemic—not one that is obsessed with holding an illegal referendum.

I will support the amendment in the name of Maurice Golden.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Richard Lyle, who will be the final speaker in the open debate. This will also be Mr Lyle's final speech.

Members: Aw!

17:21

Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I, for one, will miss you. This will be the final time that I will give a speech in the Parliament.

The past year has been horrendous for many of our citizens. It has had an impact on all sections of our society: people have lost their jobs, livelihoods and businesses, which have had to cope with various lockdowns. I have had many e-mails from constituents who face various issues, including concerns about working conditions during the Covid crisis.

Some aspects of the Labour Party's motion are laudable, but to my mind the Scottish Parliament does not have control over some of its asks—particularly those in the area of employment law. I agree that we must be bold in building back our economy. I am sure that the Scottish Government will build a stronger economy for all our citizens, many of whom have experienced poor outcomes.

Some businesses have not been able to make a single penny since last March. For one full year they have been closed and unable to operate. One such business comes to mind—of course, I speak of showpeople. For the record, I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests. Showpeople—showmen and showwomen—do not want handouts; they want to work, but due to Covid they cannot. They are self-employed, so there is no furlough for them. The situation has been hard, and I thank the Government for opening a funding stream for showpeople. When I see what they have lost in a full year's earnings, it breaks my heart. I know that many others in our society, including wedding planners and photographers, have faced the same.

I want councils to relax licence conditions for showpeople to ensure that we can at least have funfairs operating as soon as possible. If we go back to the same old ways, we will have learned nothing. Unfortunately, due to the Covid crisis, my member's bill, which seeks to reform licence conditions, will not be passed during this parliamentary session. Councils agree that the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 needs to be reformed. I encourage the SNP and other parties to include that in their manifestos.

We need to be bold in our deeds. When the rules on the pandemic can be relaxed, we need to protect and create jobs. We should not take no for an answer.

Like many members, I want Scotland to succeed and I want the best for our people. I joined my political party in 1966, when I was 16. I was interested in what I could do for my area. I will be 71 this year.

I was 24 when I stood in my first election, in which I was beaten by the Labour candidate. That day, a Labour supporter said to me, "Don't worry, son. We can weigh the Labour vote here in Lanarkshire," and so they could. It was the hardest fiefdom to win, but we won it—and Labour cannot say that now.

In a by-election caused by the death of a councillor, I became the first SNP councillor in Bellshill. I won that seat in 1976 and again in every election from then until I left the council in 2007. I served 36 years as a councillor. I am informed that if we combine my time on the council with my time in the Parliament, I am the longest-serving SNP politician, with 45 years of political service. *[Applause.]* Thank you.

For those 36 years, I was the SNP group leader in the Motherwell district of North Lanarkshire Council. I was also the SNP group leader on the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities from 2007 to 2009, during the first years of the historic concordat, which was introduced by John Swinney and the new SNP Government. I was very pleased to play my part in helping the Government to progress that concordat—even to the extent of being among the first to beat the Labour delegates in a COSLA vote. The man who helped me to beat them, Kevin Stewart, is sitting here. Thank you, Kevin.

I was called "Kenwood the Mixer", as I stirred up things in the council. We have to stir our economy to get it going. We need to ensure that our mix is correct for all our economy.

A Labour member called me "Demolition Dick", as I was the first to suggest demolition at my council to resolve severe dampness in three-storey flats. Those flats were demolished, and new houses were built on the site. I encourage

ministers such as Kevin Stewart to be bold in seeing new projects take root.

Over the years, I have helped many people to get a house. You know you are getting old when a constituent says, "Mr Lyle, you got my mother a house when she got married. Can you get me one, please?"

I have enjoyed my time as a member of this Parliament. Where has 10 years gone? I never intended to be here, but Alex Neil encouraged me to stand in Uddingston and Bellshill, and I thank him for that. It has been a tremendous experience. I have met a lot of interesting people at Parliament events, and I have had the opportunity to visit places around Scotland with committees. My work on various Parliament committees over the years has been rewarding.

I thank the Parliament staff for all their help. They have been amazing—the best staff ever.

Some would say that I have enjoyed being the shouter during votes in the chamber. One member texted me some weeks ago, saying, "Richard, I'm so glad I hear you shouting what way to vote—because I've just voted the wrong way in the last vote." Hopefully a new shouter will be found in the next session.

I have made a lot of friends, both in my party and in Opposition parties. I enjoy winding up Maurice Golden—although he is looking at his computer now. I thank each and every one of my friends for their friendship, and I wish them all well, especially my good friends over on the Labour benches. I thank members for their kind comments—that goes, I am sure, for all retiring members.

We have to rebuild our nation, and we have to make things better. That is why I became a politician. I believe in independence—there: I have just said it. I want my country to take its place in the world. Let us build a better Scotland in the years to come: a Scotland that caters for all.

I wish the best to you all in the coming weeks and years.

I will finish by thanking my staff, who have supported me over the years. I thank my wife, Marion, my son, Vincent, and my daughter, Marina, for supporting me in my political life. I could not have done it without them. I look forward to seeing more of my family, particularly my grandchildren, Ruaridh, Iona, Nathan and Hannah—who is one today. Happy birthday, Hannah. You will see grandpa soon. *[Applause.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you very much, Mr Lyle. That was a characteristic speech.

I call Annie Wells to close the debate for the Conservatives.

17:28

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): I, too, send my best wishes to David Stewart, Sandra White, Richard Lyle and Lewis Macdonald. I wish them well for the future—and happy birthday, Hannah, too!

As has been said by others, the Covid-19 pandemic has undoubtedly been the greatest upheaval that our society has experienced since world war two. On Monday, we commemorated the one-year anniversary of the first Covid-19 positive test in Scotland. This time last year, we looked on at the situation in other countries with concern from afar at how quickly the virus was spreading. Nevertheless, we went about our daily lives as normal. Our schools were bustling with activity and learning, with students heading into exam season; public transport was teeming with commuters in our biggest cities; and our pubs, bars and nightclubs were in full swing.

None of us could have predicted the impact that the crisis would end up having on all our lives. The Scotland of today looks barely recognisable compared with the one that we left behind at the beginning of last year. However, as we come together as one to face the collective endeavour, there are signs that we are nearing the end of the crisis. Thanks to the dedication of our treasured NHS staff, the UK's outstanding vaccine roll-out programme and the efforts of the public, we are the most confident that we have been in months that the sun will soon shine on us once again.

Although we hope that the immediate threat of Covid-19 will soon pass, it is certain that we will be dealing with the aftermath of the crisis for years to come. We must act decisively to place Scotland firmly on the road to recovery, building on the incredible support—to the tune of £20 billion—that the UK Government has given to protect Scottish jobs and businesses against Covid.

The Scottish Conservatives have outlined several ambitious proposals for rebuilding Scotland, which will be firmly rooted in doing what is best for Scotland's communities and empowering them to play a leading role in Scotland's recovery.

The starting point on the road to recovery could be an overhaul of the existing business support grants system. We have repeatedly urged the Government to take full advantage of the support that it has received from the UK Treasury to save as many jobs and businesses as it can, but constituents on the ground in Glasgow tell me that the grant application process is cumbersome. Currently, there are 44 separate support funds.

We want to simplify the system by creating a single fund that will provide support to all affected businesses, solely on the basis of need. A revamp

of the support scheme would give many businesses, from our high street retailers to our local pubs, the confidence that they desperately seek. Such businesses will be key in driving Scotland's economic rebuild and the rejuvenation of our communities.

Friends and families have spent months apart. The Scottish Conservatives are calling for massive acceleration of investment in Scotland's infrastructure, to connect our towns and cities like never before. By creating a joint UK and Scotland investment body that could oversee key projects such as expansion of the M8, we can build thriving population centres and new communities between Glasgow and Edinburgh and Aberdeen and Inverness.

Scotland's councils must have the resources and the autonomy that they need if they are to support our communities beyond the pandemic. Last week, I was disappointed when the SNP voted against our motion that called for a fair funding deal to Scotland's councils that guarantees councils a set percentage of the Scottish budget every year. COSLA has made it clear that there is a gaping financial black hole of more than £500 million and the settlement that the Government offered this year does not go far enough.

Moreover, a significant amount of Government funding—£800 million in the forthcoming year alone—is ring fenced. That is money over which councils have little to no control. We will continue to make the case that an unprecedented crisis demands unprecedented support. Scotland's councils deserve far better financial backing from the Government and the freedom to base funding decisions on their communities' most urgent priorities.

No one in this Parliament should be in doubt about the scale of the challenge ahead. The Scottish people have been tested so much this year, and we, their elected representatives, owe it to them to make rebuilding Scotland and her communities our sole focus.

That is why I am frustrated by the Government's rhetoric, which suggests that its priority is to hold another divisive independence referendum, even as our fight with the deadly Covid-19 persists. It is reckless and irresponsible, not only because the uncertainty that the new variants present requires us to keep our guards up but because such rhetoric causes serious damage to our economic recovery and social fabric at a time when we all need to pull together.

As the recently published report of the talk/together project, "Our chance to reconnect", highlighted, dividing people all over again according to where they stand on the constitution

would be a serious setback to the brilliant community spirit that was generated during the pandemic. A responsible Government would realise that and unite us. As a people and a nation, we can maximise our economic recovery.

The monumental challenge of rebuilding our country will require 100 per cent of our attention in the years to come. The Scottish Conservatives are ready and determined to meet the challenge head on.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Jamie Hepburn to close for the Government.

17:34

Jamie Hepburn: Presiding Officer, may I just check how long I have?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Around six minutes. There is a little elasticity, but not a lot.

Jamie Hepburn: I will try to confine my remarks accordingly.

First, I will rectify an omission that I made at the outset of the debate. In welcoming Monica Lennon to her role, I should also have offered my congratulations to Anas Sarwar on his new role. I have done that now and put it on the record.

I thank the members who have taken part in the debate. As we reach the end of our parliamentary session, a number of colleagues have spoken for the last time, and I thank each for their contribution and their public service.

I thank David Stewart and Lewis Macdonald for all that they have done in their time as parliamentarians and in their various roles. I had not realised until he was speaking that, although he was previously a parliamentarian in another place, David Stewart entered this Parliament at the same time as I did. I know that we talk about the class of '99, but he is part of the class of 2007, of which I am also part, so that has a particular resonance for me.

I thank my colleagues Sandra White and Richard Lyle not only for their years of public service but, given that I have known both of them for a long time, for their friendship and support. I wish them, David Stewart and Lewis Macdonald all the best for their post-parliamentary lives.

Having said some nice things about some colleagues, I turn to Rachael Hamilton. She mentioned fair start Scotland, our employment programme, which she characterised in a way that, frankly, I do not recognise. According to my engagement with those who have participated in and benefited from the programme, they have valued its person-centred approach. It is unclear to me whether she has looked beyond the end of a freedom of information request that her researcher

has made for her or whether she has taken the time to engage with and speak to anyone who has participated in the programme. I would commend such engagement to her and to any other member. Whenever I have engaged with people on the programme, I have heard that they value the approach that we have taken of seeing an employment programme as an opportunity rather than as a way of threatening people with sanctions, as the Tories preferred in their work programme.

I will pick up on something that John Mason said, because it has particular relevance to a nonsense point that Dean Lockhart made. John Mason was quite correct to say that we can influence pay in Scotland. We seek to do that. We work with Living Wage Scotland and fund it to take forward the accreditation scheme for the real living wage. That has driven up the numbers of people who are paid at least the real living wage through our fair work first policy, which is being delivered in the first instance by Scottish Enterprise through the provision of regional selective assistance. More employers are paying at least the real living wage. That is why—and this is where Dean Lockhart's suggestion that we have a low-wage economy in Scotland is a nonsense—of the four UK countries, Scotland has the highest proportion of its working population being paid at least the real living wage.

I want to go further. I am not suggesting for a moment that that is the sum total of our ambitions. Of course I aspire to improved levels of pay and a better experience of the world of work. We will continue to take the approach of engaging with employers and unions in order to embed fair work not just as the basis of improving people's experience of the labour market but as the means by which we can aspire to that better-paid labour market.

Dean Lockhart: Will the minister take an intervention?

Jamie Hepburn: How much elasticity do I have, Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: If it is a short intervention, you should be fine. You still have another couple of minutes or so.

Jamie Hepburn: Well, okay.

Dean Lockhart: Thank you, Presiding Officer—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is funny; I did not call you, Mr Lockhart.

I call Dean Lockhart.

Dean Lockhart: I am very keen, as you can tell, Presiding Officer.

I thank the minister for giving way. I am curious as to whether the Scottish Government is going to

vote in favour of the Labour motion, which refers to the Scottish economy as a “low-wage economy”. Does that not mean that he recognises that, under the SNP, Scotland has become a low-wage economy? Will he clarify that position?

Jamie Hepburn: That is a useful hook for me to come to the point that I was about to make.

I fundamentally agree with the thrust and direction of Ms Lennon’s motion. I think that we need to do better to ensure that people are remunerated more than they are just now, but I reject the notion that we have a low-wage economy in Scotland.

That brings me on to my amendment. There was some concern about its brevity, which Patrick Harvie mentioned. I will certainly bear that in mind and provide copious amounts of text in my amendments in the future. As I have just said, I fundamentally agree with the direction set out in Ms Lennon’s motion, but the motion needed that short amendment.

Maurice Golden said that people of Scotland need

“this Parliament to focus on them”.

Of course they do, but he was suggesting that the amendment that I have lodged somehow has no relevance to them.

I reject the notion that there has not been a broad response to Covid-19 that is in the interests of the people. The idea that employment law has no relevance to the people of Scotland is a nonsense. Maurice Golden opposes my amendment because he supports a statutory minimum wage that is below the rate of the real living wage. He does not want to fix the broken system of statutory sick pay; he does not want to tackle fire and rehire; he does not want to change the Trade Union Act 2016, which prevents better organised labour; and he does not want those in false self-employment to be provided with proper employment rights. He wants his Tory Party colleagues at Westminster to continue their approach to employment law. It is the retention of power in those Tory hands that leads to the race to the bottom. Having the power in our hands in this Parliament will allow us to rise to the top. That is why I commend my amendment to members, and I hope that they will vote for it at decision time.

17:41

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): How long do I have, Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Around seven minutes. I do not know what has happened to you all today, not knowing how long you have got. I

feel like the speaking clock, if anybody remembers that.

Rhoda Grant: Thank you.

I also congratulate Anas Sarwar on his election, and welcome Monica Lennon to her new post.

Before I start my contribution to the debate, I pay tribute to my two colleagues who have made their valedictory speeches in Parliament in this debate. They will both be a big loss to our party and the Parliament.

Lewis Macdonald has served the north-east, raising issues that impact the lives of the people who live there. From fishing to the entirety of the energy industry—which he talked about today—he has been the go-to person in the Parliament and has a wealth of knowledge that I will miss. He has served the Parliament as a committee convener and, latterly, stepped up to assist as a Deputy Presiding Officer during the pandemic.

Likewise, David Stewart has worked to support the Parliament as a committee convener, as well as through his unstinting work on the corporate body, to which the Presiding Officer paid tribute earlier. We have shared staff and offices, and I saw at close hand the work that he did for our constituents, including his support for NHS Highland staff who faced bullying and taking the concerns of a constituent in Brora all the way through to the passage of the Buildings (Recovery of Expenses) (Scotland) Act 2014. He will be long recognised for his work on diabetes and cot death. On a personal note, I will miss having a drink with him after work in the Parliament bar—especially the very rare occasions when he paid. *[Laughter.]*

I also wish Richard Lyle and Sandra White well. Sandra White and I had the privilege of representing the Parliament at probably the worst Sunday service that we had ever been to in our lives. If either of us writes a book, I am sure that the story will take centre stage—more can be shared at a later date. They all made wonderful valedictory speeches, and I wish them well.

When she opened the debate, Monica Lennon said that, at the start of the pandemic, the slogan “we are all in it together” was coined. Sadly, we saw in sharp relief that we were not all in it together. The deep divisions and structural inequalities in our society—from jobs and work to the very ability to survive the virus—grew, and were stark to see.

Patrick Harvie said that those who could not work from home due to space and connectivity issues suffered badly. People who were on zero-hours contracts had no safety net. Women and disabled people were hardest hit by job losses. The burden of caring for relatives and children fell to women as they tried to work from home

themselves. Children from families who could not afford laptops and broadband lost out on education. Overcrowded households saw the virus rip through their homes and those living in flats without gardens could not meet with friends or relatives. The outcomes for those who were obese were poor. As John Mason said, there is a connection: poor diet leads to obesity, and those people suffered the worst outcomes from the virus. Even those with dental problems experienced the divide between those who could afford to go private and those who could not. Those on the front line worked increased hours, putting themselves and their families at risk, but they were not all health workers—they were also bus drivers, supermarket assistants and many of the lowest paid in our society.

Those divides are stark and impact every aspect of life. People living in leafy suburbs made decisions that impacted lives that they have no understanding of. Our motion calls for a change in our society. As we recover from the pandemic, we must build a society that is equal and inclusive.

Monica Lennon talked about fair work and the £11 billion procurement budget that could make such a difference. We should insist on a real living wage. We have the powers to do that now, but those powers are not used while the Scottish Government asks for more powers that, again, it will not use. What on earth is the point of power if it is not used? We must use procurement now to enforce a real living wage.

Lewis Macdonald talked about the most vulnerable before the pandemic being the most vulnerable during the pandemic, and, if we do not do something, they will be the most vulnerable after the pandemic. We must use the powers that we have.

As I said, women have been badly hit by the pandemic. Monica Lennon said that it has put equality for women, especially in employment, back by decades. Women are the most furloughed, they make up the majority of front-line workers and they are ones who have to deal with home education and providing care when people are not able to visit elderly and sick relatives.

The minister talked about an action plan, but what is the point of a plan if there is no action? Action is required if we are to make a difference. He talked about a young persons guarantee, which is simply a rebranding exercise with no new initiatives—even he admitted that it would take two years to reach some of those who really need support, and two years to a young person is a lifetime. That will lead to a lost generation—we need to do something now.

Jamie Hepburn: Will the member take an intervention?

Rhoda Grant: I am in my last minute.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is in her last minute.

Rhoda Grant: David Stewart talked about Tom Johnston and Willie Ross and their vision, and we need that vision now. We have an opportunity to do things differently and to build a society in which we all have a stake. There must be a fundamental change in which a person's life chances and life expectancy do not depend on their postcode, all work is valued and, above all else, the workers we depend on for our wellbeing are treasured. As we come out of this crisis, let us grasp that opportunity and create a country and a world where nobody is left behind.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on Scotland's recovery. We will have a short pause before the next item of business.

Standing Orders

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): Our next item of business is a short debate on motion S5M-24246, in name of Bill Kidd, on “Standing Order Rule Changes – Inquiry into the resilience of the Scottish Parliament’s practices and procedures in relation to its business”.

17:50

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): Do not worry—this will be a very short debate.

Following the introduction of lockdown provisions almost a year ago, the Scottish Parliament adapted its practices and procedures to ensure that Parliament was able to meet. Since April last year, it has met in a mix of virtual, hybrid and socially distanced formats to ensure that parliamentary business can continue. Technology has been developed to allow us to participate in parliamentary votes via a virtual platform.

The Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee’s inquiry looked at how other legislatures had adapted to the Covid pandemic. It was clear that the Scottish Parliament has been one of the best in ensuring that committee and plenary meetings and almost all types of parliamentary business can continue and that members of the Scottish Parliament can vote both in the chamber and in committees. The committee considered that to be a major achievement and a testament to the commitment and flexibility of members, the parliamentary authorities and, particularly, parliamentary staff.

The committee’s inquiry into the resilience of the Scottish Parliament considered what permanent changes were needed to standing orders to ensure that the Parliament could continue to meet in the face of any future challenges. The committee recommends in its report that a new rule should be introduced to allow for temporary rule changes to be made to standing orders for a time-limited period. That would provide greater flexibility for the Parliament, which would be able to agree more substantial changes to the rules in a shorter time.

In addition, the committee recommends that a number of permissive changes be made to allow for virtual and hybrid meetings of the chamber and of committees and for virtual voting in both the chamber and committees. It will be for the session 6 Parliament, once social distancing no longer constrains Parliament’s ability to meet physically, to consider in what circumstances virtual or hybrid meetings should take place in future.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee’s 2nd Report 2021 (Session 5), *Standing Order Rule Changes — Inquiry into the resilience of the Scottish Parliament’s practices and procedures in relation to its business* (SP Paper 953), and agrees that—

(a) the rule change on the temporary amendment to Standing Orders be made with effect from 8 March 2021, and

(b) all remaining rule changes set out in Annexe A be made with effect from 12 May 2021.

The Presiding Officer: No other member has indicated a wish to contribute. The question on the motion will be put at decision time.

Business Motion

17:53

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S5M-24274, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 9 March 2021 (Hybrid)

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions

followed by Ministerial Statement: COVID-19

followed by Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee Debate: Climate Change Plan

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Budget (Scotland) (No. 5) Bill

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

7.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 10 March 2021 (Hybrid)

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform;
Rural Economy and Tourism

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: St Andrews University (Medical Degrees) Bill

followed by Stage 3: Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Bill

followed by Legislative Consent Motion: Financial Services Bill

followed by Legislative Consent Motion: Counter-Terrorism and Sentencing Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)

6.30 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 11 March 2021 (Hybrid)

12.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

12.30 pm First Minister's Questions

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm

Portfolio Questions:
Transport, Infrastructure and
Connectivity

followed by

Stage 3 Proceedings: Redress for Survivors (Historical Child Abuse in Care) (Scotland) Bill

followed by

Scottish Biometrics Commissioner Appointment

5.10 pm

Decision Time

Tuesday 16 March 2021 (Hybrid)

2.00 pm

Time for Reflection

followed by

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by

Topical Questions

followed by

Ministerial Statement: COVID-19

followed by

Stage 3 Proceedings: United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill

followed by

Committee Announcements

followed by

Business Motions

followed by

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.30 pm

Decision Time

followed by

Members' Business

Wednesday 17 March 2021 (Hybrid)

2.00 pm

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm

Portfolio Questions:
Justice and the Law Officers;
Constitution, Europe and External Affairs

followed by

Stage 3 Proceedings: Domestic Abuse (Protection) (Scotland) Bill

followed by

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee Debate: Urgent SPCB Questions

followed by

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee Debate: Public Petitions System Changes

followed by

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee Debate: Equalities and Human Rights Committee Remit

5.20 pm

Decision Time

followed by

Members' Business

Thursday 18 March 2021 (Hybrid)

12.30

Parliamentary Bureau motions

12.30 pm

First Minister's Questions

2.30 pm

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm

Portfolio Questions:
Economy, Fair Work and Culture

followed by

Scottish Government Debate: Local Government Finance Order

followed by

Scottish Government Debate: Drugs policy

followed by

Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee Debate:

Changes to Private and Hybrid Bill procedures

followed by Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee Debate: Changes in Relation to Revised Accompanying Documents for Emergency Bills

followed by Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee Debate: Changes to the Financial Scrutiny Provisions

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.35 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 8 March 2021, in rule 13.7.3, after the word “except” the words “to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or” are inserted.—[*Graeme Dey*]

The Presiding Officer: No member has indicated that they wish to speak.

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S5M-24275, on the campaign recess.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) for the purpose of the pre-election campaign period from 25 March to 4 May 2021 (inclusive), that the office of the clerk be closed from 25 March to 4 May 2021 (inclusive);

(b) in respect of meetings of committees and sub-committees during the pre-election campaign period, that, in rule 12.3.3, the word “normally” in the second sentence be suspended and the words “, except in the case of the COVID-19 Committee which may be convened by the Convener in an emergency” be inserted after “recess”; and

(c) for the purpose of the lodging of written questions immediately prior to the pre-election campaign period, that rule 13.3.4A be suspended and replaced with—

“The last day on which written questions may be lodged in the current session is Thursday 11 March 2021.”—[*Graeme Dey*]

17:53

James Kelly (Glasgow) (Lab): I wish to speak in opposition to Parliamentary Bureau motion S5M-24275. The motion is titled “Campaign Recess” but its essential point is that it brings forward the closure of the office of the clerk, which restricts and inhibits members from submitting written parliamentary questions. The important thing to understand about the period that we enter is that, although we head towards an election, we will not have the dissolution that would normally happen. Instead, we are moving into a period of recess, and all MSPs will continue in post until 5 May.

Understandably, because a pandemic is on-going, the Government will be dealing with issues around that. All MSPs continue to get multiple requests on issues such as vaccine roll-out and requests from businesses that are struggling with support, people who are unsure about their job prospects, and pupils and parents with concerns about the on-going issues in the education system. It is important that MSPs are able to continue to submit questions to Government ministers and to hold Government ministers to account. Closing the office of the clerk and stopping the ability to submit written questions from Thursday 11 March restricts MSPs in their ability to do their job of representing their constituents and holding the Government to account. Scottish Labour is therefore not able to endorse that motion tonight.

17:56

The Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans (Graeme Dey): The Parliamentary Bureau has considered the implications of the Scottish General Election (Coronavirus) Act 2021 on parliamentary business on a number of occasions. In December last year, it agreed that any business during the short campaign period should be limited to matters that are absolutely necessary in response to the pandemic. That agreement is consistent with the purposes of the act and the elections guidance from the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, which anticipates that the Parliament would not meet during the short campaign period unless for emergency reasons. It is intended to help ensure that parliamentary resources are not used for any party-political or election campaigning activity and that all candidates are treated the same during what would normally be a period of dissolution; at the same time, it allows for Parliament to be recalled in an emergency.

The bureau therefore agreed to propose to Parliament that we should go into recess during that period, with the usual option of recall where necessary. However, essentially, it is a recess period, not a dissolution, for one primary purpose, which is to ensure that, if it became necessary to cancel the election because of an escalation in the pandemic, members of Parliament could return to take that decision. The proposal was unanimously agreed to by the Parliament on 17 February 2021.

The bureau recognises that all members will be aware of the policies that restrict the use of parliamentary resources during the short campaign. However, it was also agreed to look at further procedural steps to limit what business could be transacted, while allowing, if necessary, business in relation to the pandemic to take place. In considering possible steps, the bureau was conscious of balancing the interests of providing flexibility for any necessary scrutiny to take place against the limitations of the short campaign period. It is for that reason that an exception is proposed to enable the COVID-19 Committee, if it considers it necessary, to meet in an emergency. To be clear, the Scottish ministers are required to ensure the lifting of any restrictions that are no longer necessary in order to protect public health. However, if changes were made that the COVID-19 Committee felt were significant enough to invite its attention, it could sit, and the Government would provide a minister to attend.

Of course, Presiding Officer, you retain the power to recall Parliament during any period that it is in recess, although, as you have indicated previously, a very high bar would have to be set in order for you to interrupt the election recess period.

I summarise matters in the following way: this Parliament is far from unable to hold ministers to account during the pre-election period, but a sensible, proportionate approach is being taken to ensure that that is the case, in keeping with other decisions that the Parliamentary Bureau has previously taken.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. The question on that motion will be taken at decision time.

The next item of business is consideration of five Parliamentary Bureau motions, S5M-24276 to S5M-24280, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016 (Adult Carers and Young Carers of Terminally Ill Persons: Timescales for Adult Carer Support Plans and Young Carer Statements etc.) Regulations 2021 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 (Modification) Order 2021 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Community Care (Personal Care and Nursing Care) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2021 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Low Emission Zones (Emission Standards, Exemptions and Enforcement) (Scotland) Regulations 2021 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the National Bus Travel Concession Scheme for Young Persons (Scotland) Order 2021 [draft] be approved.—[*Graeme Dey*]

Decision Time

17:59

The Presiding Officer (Ken Macintosh): The first question is, that motion SM5-24247, in the name of Lewis Macdonald, on “What should primary care look like for the next generation?”, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament notes the Health and Sport Committee’s 8th Report 2021 (Session 5), *What should Primary Care look like for the next generation?* (SP Paper 939).

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S5M-24263.2, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, which seeks to amend motion S5M-24263, in the name of Monica Lennon, on Scotland’s recovery, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division. This will be the first division of the day, so I suspend business for a few moments to allow members in the chamber and elsewhere to access the voting app.

18:00

Meeting suspended.

18:04

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We move to the vote on amendment S5M-24263.2, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, which seeks to amend motion S5M-24263, in the name of Monica Lennon, on Scotland’s recovery. Members may vote now. This will be a one-minute division.

The vote is now closed. Please let me know if you were not able 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)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)

Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 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)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, 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)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 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)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Ind)

Against

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)
 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)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 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)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S5M-24263.2, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, which seeks to amend motion S5M-24263, in the name of Monica Lennon, on Scotland's recovery is: For 84, Against 33, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that amendment S5M-24263.1, in the name of Maurice Golden, on Scotland's recovery, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a one-minute division.

For

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)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (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)
 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)

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)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 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)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, 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)
 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)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Ind)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S5M-24263.1, in the name of Maurice Golden, on Scotland's recovery is: For 29, Against 89, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that motion S5M-24263, in the name of Monica Lennon, on Scotland's recovery, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a one-minute division.

The vote is now closed. I ask members to let me know if they were unable to vote.

Jenny Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I am sorry, but my app would not connect. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Marra. I will make sure that your vote is added.

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)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)

Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Fee, Mary (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Neil (Lothian) (Lab)
 Finnie, John (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 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)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, 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)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 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)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Ind)

Against

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)
 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)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 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)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S5M-24263, in the name of Monica Lennon, on Scotland's recovery, as amended, is: For 84, Against 34, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament believes that the next parliamentary session must be focused on rebuilding the economy for all of Scotland after the COVID-19 pandemic and addressing the structural inequalities that the pandemic has exposed in society and the opportunities that have been continually missed to deliver for workers and transform the exploitative, low-wage economy; calls therefore on the Scottish Government to recognise the need for a bold system change and for urgent action to make Scotland a Fair Work Nation, including prioritising greater support for disabled workers, ethnic minorities, women and young workers who often experience poorer work outcomes and are often more heavily concentrated in precarious and low-paid work; adhering to fair work principles, calls for further support for businesses and sectors hit hardest, to protect and create jobs, and agrees that the green economic recovery must be people-centred and incorporate community wealth building opportunities in order to drive success, wellbeing and prosperity for individuals, businesses and communities across the whole of Scotland, and that, to properly address

these issues, the Scottish Parliament needs to have control over employment law.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-24246, in the name of Bill Kidd, on "Standing Order Rule Changes – Inquiry into the resilience of the Scottish Parliament's practices and procedures in relation to its business", be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament notes the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's 2nd Report 2021 (Session 5), *Standing Order Rule Changes – Inquiry into the resilience of the Scottish Parliament's practices and procedures in relation to its business* (SP Paper 953), and agrees that—

(a) the rule change on the temporary amendment to Standing Orders be made with effect from 8 March 2021, and

(b) all remaining rule changes set out in Annexe A be made with effect from 12 May 2021.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-24275, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on the campaign recess, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is now closed. Please let me know if you were not able 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)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bowman, Bill (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Peter (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Corry, Maurice (West Scotland) (Con)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 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)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Meams) (SNP)

Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harris, Alison (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Johnstone, Alison (Lothian) (Green)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lindhurst, Gordon (Lothian) (Con)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lyle, Richard (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Angus (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Mason, Tom (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAlpine, Joan (South Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McDonald, Mark (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Neil, Alex (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Gail (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (North East Scotland) (LD)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Michael (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tomkins, Adam (Glasgow) (Con)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Wheelhouse, Paul (South Scotland) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wightman, Andy (Lothian) (Ind)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Beamish, Claudia (South Scotland) (Lab)

Abstentions

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S5M-24275, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on the campaign recess, is: For 95, Against 1, Abstentions 21.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees—(a) for the purpose of the pre-election campaign period from 25 March to 4 May 2021 (inclusive), that the office of the clerk be closed from 25 March to 4 May 2021 (inclusive);(b) in respect of meetings of committees and sub-committees during the pre-election campaign period, that, in rule 12.3.3, the word “normally” in the second sentence be suspended and the words “, except in the case of the COVID-19 Committee which may be convened by the Convener in an emergency” be inserted after “recess”; and(c) for the purpose of the lodging of written questions immediately prior to the pre-election campaign period, that rule 13.3.4A be suspended and replaced with—“The last day on which written questions may be lodged in the current session is Thursday 11 March 2021.”

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motions S5M-24276 to S5M-24280, in the name of Graeme Dey, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016 (Adult Carers and Young Carers of Terminally Ill Persons: Timescales for Adult Carer Support Plans and Young Carer Statements etc.) Regulations 2021 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 (Modification) Order 2021 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Community Care (Personal Care and Nursing Care) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2021 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Low Emission Zones (Emission Standards, Exemptions and Enforcement) (Scotland) Regulations 2021 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the National Bus Travel Concession Scheme for Young Persons (Scotland) Order 2021 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time. We will move on to members' business shortly. In the meantime, I encourage all members who are leaving to follow the one-way systems, to wear their masks and to observe social distancing rules. Thank you.

Autism and Learning Disabilities

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Lewis Macdonald): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-24199, in the name of Alexander Burnett, on further support for autism and learning disabilities.

The debate will be concluded without any questions being put. I ask those members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament commends ENABLE Scotland, National Autistic Society Scotland, Scottish Autism, people with a learning disability, autistic people, families, carers, professionals and academics, who have come together to campaign for what they consider is much-needed change; commends the vision and aspirations of the Scottish Strategy on Autism and the Keys to Life Strategy for people with a learning disability, both of which come to an end in 2021; considers that there is still much more work to be done to realise the aspirations of these strategies across a range of areas, and that this is evident from the members of the Cross-Party Groups on Autism and Learning Disability; believes that such areas include diagnosis, post-diagnosis support, additional support in school, access to employment, social care, quality and appropriate healthcare and housing and advocacy, as well as training for professionals and greater understanding among Scottish society, including in the Aberdeenshire West constituency, and notes the calls for a new commissioner role to bring further accountability to the system, uphold the rights of autistic people and people with a learning disability, and their families, and improve access to services and support so that they can be equal members of society.

18:14

Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con): Like many newly elected MSPs, five years ago, I was faced with a huge variety of case work, much of which I had no prior knowledge or experience of. A lot of it involved the lack of access to services and support for those in the autism and additional support needs community, and, speaking to fellow MSPs in the Parliament, I found that that was not just a north-east issue. Therefore, I thank members from across the chamber for their support in securing this debate.

I also thank them—in particular, my co-convener, Annie Wells—for their on-going support for the cross-party group on autism, which we founded in 2017. I offer special thanks to the National Autistic Society Scotland and Scottish Autism, which have successfully been the secretariat since then—so successfully that it is undoubtedly the best attended CPG that I am involved with, and the current Zoom format has allowed more people from across Scotland to join. I believe that we were one of the first to take our CPG on the road, up to the north-east, which

allowed participation by many who otherwise would have continued to be excluded.

Before I talk about the issues, I thank those in the community for two particularly important lessons. The first is how personal autism is to each individual: no two people are alike. Learning to listen to them and understand individual needs leads to understanding their individual potential. The second lesson is that autism is not a learning disability. Thirty per cent of people with autism might have learning disabilities, but to conflate the two stigmatises and hinders understanding and resolution.

Those points turn into three stumbling blocks. The first is diagnosis: people are crying out for diagnosis and for care and support after they receive it. However, there is a huge gap in the provision of those services. People wait months for diagnosis and then the battle to get support for them begins, which is an on-going struggle for many.

The second stumbling block is education. Right now, with home schooling, we have varying feedback. Some pupils have flourished, whereas others have had huge setbacks to their education. That has not been helped by the fact that there is a severe lack of understanding of their needs. That is not the fault of our wonderful teaching staff, but they need the resources and training to provide the support. What has been startling to me is that so many children from the community are not supported in their transition from education into the working world, which is a scary process for any teenager.

That leads to the third stumbling block: employment. Those with autism and ASN have found that they fear furlough and redundancy more than others, as they are scared of asking for reasonable adjustments. If they lose their job, the struggle of having no job and no income can be exponentially more stressful to that community, and the fear of finding a new job that supports them can be crippling.

Fortunately, many organisations are doing their utmost to work on those issues and more. I thank not only the national bodies but those closer to home. I have had the good fortune to visit and work with ASK North East, the Grampian Autistic Society, Grampian Opportunities and SensationALL, to name but a few. They have worked for many years to assist the autism community, and I thank them for giving me a broader understanding of the further support that is required in the north-east.

The most serious issue for me came through my awareness of those with autism who, instead of receiving understanding and care, were ignored and locked up in mental institutions, which caused

further deterioration, with no prospect of improvement or release. One of those cases involves Kyle Gibbon. Members across the chamber know that I have brought much attention to that individual case and have raised it directly with the Minister for Mental Health—with, it pains me to say it, disappointing results. Kyle has been locked up in the state hospital at Carstairs for most of his adult life and remains there to this day. While staff justify keeping him there on behavioural grounds, his mother, Tracey, strongly believes that his detention is causing problems, not solving them. Allegations of bullying and inappropriate treatment fail to see the light of day.

It is not only Kyle. Ruth Hughes came forward with her story of her son, Gordon. He has been locked up in Carstairs for the past three years. His doctor recommended that he be moved to a medium-secure hospital. However, he was sent to Carstairs instead, because no medium-secure beds were available, and he remains there to this day.

What is so shocking is not just the further allegations of mistreatment on which families fail to get answers, but the fact that the future for those young men, who are in good physical health, is a lifetime of incarceration, locked up alongside those who are guilty of heinous crimes, simply because the Government will not resource their treatment.

All of that, however, leads to potential solutions. A recent report from the cross-party group proposed a commissioner to allow accountability and safeguard rights for autistic people and those with additional support needs. I support the next steps of investigation, which should come in the next Parliament.

That might be the required outcome, but it should not prevent other solutions being arrived at or absolve others of existing responsibilities. Improvements in policy development and professional practice, consistency across local authorities and increased budgetary consideration can be delivered today and are all within the power of the Scottish Government.

That failing of Government is not confined to autism but, sadly, demonstrates a far greater problem with Holyrood. However, one thing is clear: the autistic community needs a voice and needs to be part of the solution. The cross-party group was long overdue and has given them a voice here, in Holyrood, which tonight's debate amplifies. Nevertheless, we must not stop now. The autistic community must not be left behind, and I will continue to do all that I can to ensure that we achieve true equality for that community.

18:21

Joan McAlpine (South Scotland) (SNP): I congratulate Alexander Burnett on securing the debate. As the vice-convenor of the cross-party group on learning disability, I am delighted to support calls for a commissioner for learning disability and autism. We have made progress in Scotland, with keys to life and the Scottish strategy on autism, but there is much more to do, as Alexander Burnett outlined in relation to the shocking examples that he just gave with regard to autism. My remarks will be about learning disability.

Over the course of the pandemic, I have raised concerns about the higher mortality rate of learning disabled people, but care workers for learning disabled people received routine testing only this year and all learning disabled people got prioritised for the vaccine only last week. I hope that a commissioner would have pushed for that earlier.

Keys to life acknowledges the poor health outcomes and the need for reasonable adjustments for people with learning disabilities, but those do not always happen. It also recommends the provision of better data to identify people with learning disabilities. We now know that that is not in place, which will make it harder to reach that community with the vaccine. The understandable desire to ensure that people with learning disabilities are treated as equal citizens has perhaps created a fear of medicalising them inappropriately, but that ignores their vulnerability, and I hope that lessons can be learned by any future commissioner.

Another issue that I have raised, which I hope that a commissioner would address, is the loss of support services during the pandemic—in particular, building-based day services. That has happened despite the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport repeatedly stating that the health and social care partnerships would be fully reimbursed for providing those services, as well as writing to the heads of social work to tell them that day services are important. My motion on that subject received cross-party support, and I thank all those who signed it, but, unfortunately, it did not secure debate time. Even when shops, pubs, schools and other services reopened last summer, adult day services remained closed or severely restricted. Alternatives, including those using self-directed support, were often poor—perhaps a walk for a few hours a week around a shopping centre, colouring-in packs or a chat on an iPad for a couple of hours.

Several families have told me that health and social care partnerships were using the pandemic as an excuse to close those services altogether. The father of a young adult who attended the

Murray Owen centre in East Kilbride told me—as did others—how much his daughter was suffering from the disruption to her life that the closure of the centre has caused. He said that it offered stimulation through a variety of activities, professional support and, perhaps most important, a caring community. That has all been snatched away. Her dad told me that she wants to be with her friends but that her views are ignored.

Glasgow and North Lanarkshire have already closed day service centres, and Inverclyde and South Lanarkshire are currently redesigning them. The dad to whom I spoke believes that those decisions are driven by an ideological antipathy to day services, which ignores the views of those who use and love the services. The services are not for everyone, but, if we are in favour of personalised care, we need to listen to people. I hope that any commissioner who is appointed will understand that the community of people with learning disabilities and autism is as varied in its needs as society at large and that all individuals must be listened to, even when some of them want to use services that do not correspond to current fashions.

Although I support the creation of the role of commissioner, I have concerns about demands for the full incorporation into Scots law of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. That follows my meeting with the Royal College of Psychiatrists and LEAD Scotland, which highlighted the unintended consequences of removing the concept of incapacity. Doing so could end guardianship, remove caring families from decisions that affect their loved ones, resulting in worse health outcomes, and put power in the hands of the very authorities that have presided over poor outcomes for years. The Royal College of Psychiatrists says that that is why the convention has not been fully adopted by any other jurisdiction in the world, and it is concerned about how consultations around mental health and incapacity in Scotland have been conducted.

As someone who has direct family experience of someone with a learning disability, I back the campaign for a commissioner. However, I hope that any future commissioner, and the minister, will accept that vulnerable people face real life challenges and must come ahead of abstract concepts that could make their lives even more difficult.

18:26

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): I am participating remotely, so I cannot see which minister is responding to the debate. However, I look forward to hearing the Government's response.

I thank my colleague Alexander Burnett for introducing such an important debate. It has been a busy news day, but raising awareness of such issues, whether we participate remotely or otherwise, is our bread and butter. I, too, receive a lot of casework on the matter, which I will delve into in my contribution.

I will start by reflecting on a wider point, which is the greater impact of the events of the past year, specifically on people with autism and learning difficulties, based on my experiences of helping people through my remote case work. Just last week, I was contacted by a mother in Ayrshire whose son is a young adult who suffers from developmental disabilities. Previously, he attended his local college, and she told me that he loved it. He has been out of college for the best part of a year, and has been told not to expect to return until after the summer. That is causing them both great concern. She understands why the college is staggering the return in phases, but she is frustrated at the lack of any apparent plan to get special needs students back into classrooms and colleges.

Another family got in touch just before Christmas. They messaged my office about the deteriorating mental health of their autistic son, who was in a learning disability care home and was not allowed any visits from his parents, for obvious reasons. He was not allowed to come home for Christmas, and, despite plans having been made to get university students back home for Christmas, no such plans were made for him.

Before Christmas, we flagged the issue to the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, and it was disappointing to learn afterwards that no plans were put in place. My constituent is still not sure when her son will receive his vaccine, although we are all pleased with the changes to the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation's recommendations in that regard. Anyone who listens to BBC Radio 2 will know about that, as it has been developing the story.

Over the past few months, I have heard many examples of similar situations. I have heard about people engaging in self-harm and about an increase in depression and anxiety because many people have simply been unable to understand the restrictions that they and their families have been asked to follow. Their norms are topsy-turvy due to the need to wear face masks, observe physical or social distancing and, not least, changes to their everyday routine and a lack of social interaction. Such things are difficult enough for us as individuals, but they must have a profound effect on those with learning disabilities or severe autism. It has been an anxious time, and we can

only imagine how amplified such frustration and anxiety will have been for those individuals.

I commend the National Autistic Society for its good work in researching this. We know that nine out of 10 autistic people worried about their mental health during lockdown and that 85 per cent of respondents to the society's survey said that their anxiety levels had worsened. There have been some instances of people taking their own lives during lockdown because they were unable to cope or to see a way forward. Those are unbearably tragic situations.

There are still too many gaps in the system of support for this group. The Education and Skills Committee took evidence on the Morgan review into additional support needs provision in Scotland. That review said that support was "fragmented and inconsistent" and that it is

"not ensuring that all children and young people who need additional support are being supported to flourish and fulfil their potential."

That is the vital point. Those young people must be able to flourish and to fulfil their potential. It is estimated that almost a third of school pupils have some form of additional support need. There is no simple fix for that: tweaking the system is not a solution. Systemic assistance must be delivered in our schools.

The number of additional support needs teachers has fallen by more than 1,000 in the past 10 years. Recruitment is heading in the wrong direction. That is a perfect storm, and I have spoken about it many times in the Parliament.

I pay tribute to Angela Morgan's report and encourage the minister to read it and its recommendations. It sets out a number of things that the Government—indeed, the next Government—could do immediately to provide better for ASN pupils.

The debate is short and it is hard to keep track of time without a clock on my screen, but we must think about our approach to ASN provision. The pandemic has highlighted a number of challenges that we already knew about and has shed light on many others. Physically disabled young people and those with additional support needs or autism deserve the same high standards of education, health and life as those that any other young person in Scotland is entitled to. We should not accept anything less.

18:32

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): I thank Alexander Burnett for lodging the motion. It is a pleasure to take part in the debate.

I commend all those who have come together to campaign for much-needed change and to

improve the lives of people with autism and learning disabilities. In particular, I pay tribute to unpaid carers for all that they do for their loved ones. They have our thanks and admiration, and they deserve to be recognised by the Parliament.

The motion is a reminder that, despite the progress that has been made, there is still much for the Parliament to do and to consider further in the next session. A number of those challenges are set out in the motion, including in relation to diagnosis and the importance of good post-diagnosis support. I underline, as Joan McAlpine did, the importance of day services and of advocacy, particularly as legislation and welfare rights continue to change and evolve.

We all share an ambition to build a more inclusive Scotland in which all our rights are respected and where nobody is unfairly denied opportunities. We all have a responsibility to realise those shared ambitions.

This week, we marked a full year since the Covid pandemic arrived in Scotland. Like Jamie Greene, I am conscious of the impact that the past 12 months have had on autistic people, people with learning disabilities and those closest to them.

The roll-out of a vaccine gives real hope that the crisis is coming to an end. However, as Joan McAlpine said, many of those working to support people with learning disabilities have concerns about the way in which the roll-out is being progressed.

The priority plan established by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation places people with severe or profound learning disabilities in group 6. They will have begun to receive appointments. The First Minister has indicated that others with learning disabilities will be prioritised, too, which is welcome.

However, some vulnerable adults with learning disabilities are currently falling through a disturbing gap in the programme. I know of one provider, Cosgrove Care, which estimates that 50 per cent of the people in its supported accommodation have not yet been offered a vaccine. The Scottish Government rightly wants to prioritise the most vulnerable, yet here is a group of vulnerable people who face significant challenges in receiving the vaccine.

Joan McAlpine mentioned a lack of data. Different records are held by different surgeries and many of the people concerned need to be vaccinated at home, not in a central vaccination centre.

Providers have rightly commended—as do I—the work of the people on the ground who are delivering the vaccine and, in particular, those who are involved in the roll-out of the vaccine to care

homes. They tell me that a consistent approach to vaccination that was modelled on the programme in care homes, that was co-ordinated and that allowed vulnerable people to receive the vaccine in their own home would make an enormous difference. It would ensure that nobody in supported accommodation would fall through the gap.

I ask the minister to consider whether the roll-out is addressing the needs of people with learning disabilities, especially those who live in supported accommodation, which I am sure that the Government understands is a unique environment. I know that the Government has received various requests for different groups to be prioritised, but I impress on the minister the importance of rolling out the vaccine to the most vulnerable people as soon as possible.

Let us get the vaccine to the people who need it most and then, as we emerge from the pandemic, let us begin the work of improving the lives of autistic people and people with learning disabilities.

18:35

Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind): I thank Alexander Burnett for securing the debate. Although this is not quite my final speech as a member of the Scottish Parliament, it is my final speech on this subject. I begin by making my final declaration of interests as a parent of a child with autistic spectrum disorder.

I will spend the majority of my speech offering some reflections on a decade of campaigning on the issue and why that leads me to support the campaign of NAS Scotland, Scottish Autism and Enable for a commissioner for autistic people and people with learning disabilities. At the outset, I thank those organisations for their briefing, which was instructive and chimed with much of the experience of my case load, not just during the pandemic but in general.

Alexander Burnett mentioned that autism is not a learning disability. That is absolutely correct but, as he also mentioned, there is clear intersection, where there are people who have autism and a comorbid learning disability. Therefore, it makes sense for the campaign to focus on the area that it focuses on, because there are a reasonable number of people who have autism and a learning disability, and for whom many of the challenges of autism and learning disability are manifest.

The briefing from NAS Scotland, Scottish Autism and Enable talks about the exhaustion of families. Over the past 10 years, if there was one word that would sum up the experience of the families I have encountered, whether constituents or the people I have come to know as dear friends

who have children with learning disability or autism and whom I have encountered through the groups that my son attends, “exhaustion” would be one of the top words that I would use. That is the case because, for too many people, the securing of appropriate support—support to which they are entitled—is a fight. Too often, they are told “No” when they should be told “Yes”. It is only after expending a significant amount of energy on fighting decisions and recruiting councillors, MSPs, MPs and supporting organisations that they can finally secure that support. All too often, it feels as though the system’s first reaction to many people is to turn them away, and that only when they take on the system do they find that it works in their favour. That must change.

Many good things are being done at a governmental level; I know that from my time as a minister and as a Government back bencher. The problem is how that filters down to those on the front line and how they deliver the support to the people who require it. That leads to the question of accountability and why I believe that the role of commissioner is needed. For too many of the good intentions and the well-thought-out policies, the accountability for delivery is not there. We saw that when local autism plans were introduced. Too many local authorities were given money, but there was no accountability for the construction of those plans and their subsequent delivery at local level. The creation of a commissioner, as envisaged by the charities, would help with the accountability question. I do not deny that good work has been done, but there is still a road to travel, and the implementation of the charities’ asks could do a huge amount to support the people whom we as MSPs represent.

18:40

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): I, too, thank Alexander Burnett for bringing the debate to the Parliament, because it is on a hugely important topic with which I am intimately concerned. I should declare my diagnosis with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and the fact that I am a trustee of the ADHD Foundation. I make that declaration because, quite simply, it is impossible to talk about the issues without discussing the intersections between the conditions.

Alexander Burnett, in setting out the case, was absolutely right to make a distinction between autism and learning disabilities and to take us through the issues surrounding diagnosis, education and employment. In all those categories, people with autism face critical issues, and there is a failure to provide joined-up assistance for them.

I will briefly mention Joan McAlpine’s contribution. Although I want to focus largely on the role of the commissioner, the point about day care cannot be made—[*Inaudible.*]—a number of day care organisations facing exactly the challenges that Joan McAlpine mentioned. Those organisations faced challenges before the pandemic, but the challenges have been deepened by the approach that has been taken during it.

Alexander Burnett mentioned shocking cases regarding the incarceration of people with autistic spectrum disorder, and I will add some additional shocking prison facts. People with ADHD account for around 3 to 5 per cent of the general population but 25 per cent of the prison population, which is five times the incidence in the general population. In the general population, dyslexia has an incidence of 10 per cent, but half of all prisoners have dyslexia. Around 2 per cent of the general population have autism, but between 4 to 8 per cent of the prison population are found to have it, which is two to four times the general incidence.

That is shocking. The disproportionate level of people with those conditions in prison represents an abject failure of public services and public policies. If any other section of society was overrepresented in that shocking way, there would be a national outcry. We need a broad change in the way that we approach those conditions and the way that we design services to address them, because, right now, there is a silent failure of huge proportions that has occurred for people with those conditions.

Autism and learning disabilities need the focus of a commissioner—[*Inaudible.*]—is broad and systemic. People within the broad bracket of neurodiversity conditions account for 20 per cent of the overall population, but the services that they use are not joined up and are not designed for them. As Mark McDonald outlined, people have to fight to gain access, and they are being failed. I do not deny that progress has been made, but, all too often, policies have been confined to the silos of education and health. The policies do not involve joined-up thinking and, ultimately, they are not designed to help people in their day-to-day lives; they are designed to manage the deficit and disability rather than to help people with their talents and capability.

A change in attitudes is also required, because we find, all too often, that the conditions are used as terms of abuse. When was the last time that members heard someone regard a person’s spelling as “a bit dyslexic” or someone failing to pay attention as being “a bit ADHD”? When was the last time that members heard a person described as being “on the spectrum” because

they appear slightly odd or socially inadequate? The sad reality is that, all too often, people use those terms as terms of abuse and do so acceptably and without reproach or comment. Attitudes need to change, as well as services and policies. That intolerance is completely unacceptable and must end.

In closing, I will briefly mention the Morgan review, which underlined the fight that people have to make, the marginalisation that people experience and the fact that, all too often, although the issues are acknowledged, mainstreaming simply means pupils being placed in cupboards for the provision of their learning or part-time timetabling for their education. The need for change has never been more apparent. A commissioner could be the lightning rod for that change, because people with autism and learning disabilities need change—[*Inaudible.*]—with talent, ability and contributions to make. Without those changes, they will simply be denied the ability to take part in society that they have every right to expect.

18:45

The Minister for Mental Health (Clare Haughey): I, too, thank Alexander Burnett for bringing to the attention of Parliament the campaign of Enable Scotland, the National Autistic Society Scotland and Scottish Autism for an autism and learning disability commissioner. I also thank members for their speeches and contributions in what has been a useful debate for raising awareness of autism and learning disabilities. I recently met those organisations, and it was good to hear more about their campaign, what they foresee the role of the commissioner being and, more important, how that will improve the lives of autistic people and people with learning disabilities.

I am aware that the recommendation for the establishment of a commissioner was in the report of the cross-party group on autism, “The Accountability Gap”, which was published in October 2020. I had the pleasure of speaking to the cross-party group in October, to update it on autism and learning disability policy.

As has been mentioned, the Scottish strategy for autism comes to an end this year. Along with the keys to life strategy, it has set out the key priorities for Government and public services in how improvements can be made to ensure that autistic people and people with learning disabilities can live independent and healthy lives. Those strategies have been informed by people with lived experience. The Scottish strategy for autism is currently being independently evaluated, and I look forward to seeing the results of that evaluation in the spring.

Going forward, and learning from the experiences of the Covid pandemic, the Scottish Government has been working with autistic people and people with learning disabilities, autism and learning disability representative bodies and care providers on a towards transformation plan. The plan, which we are developing in partnership with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, will take a human rights-based approach and will look at the particular needs of Scotland’s autistic people and people with learning disabilities.

We see the plan as the beginning of the conversation about how we change Scotland for the better for autistic people and people with learning disabilities. I am pleased that wide stakeholder engagement has taken place, with People First (Scotland) and the autistic people’s organisations inputting into how the plan is led and governed. It is essential that autistic people and people with learning disabilities are at the centre of how their human rights are protected.

The debate has demonstrated the wide understanding among members that autistic people and people with learning disabilities face inequalities and prejudice in many aspects of their day-to-day lives. The towards transformation plan will set out a number of priorities that we want to deliver on in order to ensure that rights are protected and inequalities addressed.

There have been many positive developments in education policy in the past year—an issue that Jamie Greene raised. In December 2020, we published the autism action plan, which sets out actions to improve the support that is provided to autistic children in Scotland’s schools. An implementation group will drive forward that important work and will report to the Deputy First Minister.

Angela Morgan’s review of additional support for learning, which was published in 2020, suggested several areas for improvement in how we support children and young people to flourish. Her report sets out a clear direction, and the Scottish Government and COSLA have developed a joint action plan to implement its recommendations. We are determined to improve the educational experiences of children and young people with additional support needs and to make Scotland the best place in the world for them to grow up in.

Members will be aware that we debated the independent review of adult social care in February. That review gives us the opportunity to improve people’s lives—particularly the lives of people with autism and learning disabilities. Although it will be for the next Parliament and Government to move forward on the review, we have taken immediate action to secure improvements for people with autism and learning disabilities, including through a new community

living change fund of £20 million, which was announced by the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport on 16 February. The fund will deliver a redesign of services for people with complex needs, including autism and learning disabilities, and for those with enduring mental health problems.

Maurice Corry (West Scotland) (Con): I declare that my wife is an ASN teacher at a primary school in Helensburgh, so I hear a lot about the fantastic work that they do in supporting children with all sorts of difficulties. An area of concern is higher and further education, in which there is definitely a gap because of the need for more support and its retention. Decisions about budgets that are being made in higher education might mean that those people are lost and not replaced, which is an important issue. In this day and age, we need to ensure that our young people are properly prepared for life, in which regard, I was interested in Daniel Johnson's comments about prisons. Does the minister agree that we need to address those issues, particularly in higher education and prisons, as well as helping people to understand the learning support needs of the young people concerned and giving them a fair chance in life?

Clare Haughey: As the minister with responsibility for autism and learning disabilities, I support having any additional support for those communities. Maurice Corry will be aware that, over the course of the pandemic, additional moneys have been provided to higher and further education to support the wellbeing of students through what has been a challenging and difficult time. I accept that, for members of the learning disability and autism community, the pandemic has been even more challenging. We are working closely with charities and representative bodies to do what we can to support those people, including those in higher and further education. I thank Mr Corry for his intervention on the matter.

I am pleased that discussions have commenced with a wide range of autism and learning disability organisations. I will meet a range of autistic people and people with learning disabilities in the coming weeks in relation to the Scottish Government's towards transformation plan. In that plan, we have committed to exploring further the proposals for a commission or commissioner to help protect people's rights.

I turn now to points that members have made in the debate. A couple of members raised concerns about the vaccination programme for people with learning disabilities. We are working closely with national health service boards to ensure that everyone with a learning disability is identified for vaccination. On 25 February, the chief medical officer for Scotland and the chief nursing officer for

Scotland wrote to confirm the role of learning disability nurses in both identifying people with a learning disability and delivering those vaccinations, including in people's homes, where that is more appropriate.

At the outset of the debate, Mr Burnett raised two specific cases. As members will appreciate, due to the laws governing patient confidentiality, I am not able to discuss individual patients. However, secure units, including the state hospital, focus on the provision of high-quality and person-centred care and treatment in a safe and secure environment. All patients at the state hospital have the right to make an application to the Mental Health Tribunal for Scotland if they wish to appeal against their detention or the level of security that they are held under. Those safeguards are important and are rightly channelled through the mental health tribunal.

I want to hear at first hand the views of the learning disability and autism communities on the proposal for a commissioner, what they would want a commissioner's role to be and, crucially, the wider routes that could be investigated to ensure that the human rights of autistic people and people with learning disabilities are upheld and protected. To that end, as well as meeting various organisations, I am arranging a meeting with autistic people and people with learning disabilities, to hear from existing commissioners about their role in improving lives. Again, that will be an opportunity for people with lived experience to be part of the conversation on developments that affect them. I am committed to ensuring that autistic people and people with learning disabilities continue to be at the heart of exploring the introduction of a commissioner.

I thank members for their contributions to the debate.

Meeting closed at 18:55.

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