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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 21 September 2021

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Good afternoon. I remind members of the Covid-related measures that are in place and that face coverings should be worn when moving around the chamber and across the Holyrood campus.

The first item of business is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is Professor Sir Geoff Palmer, the Chancellor of Heriot-Watt University.

Professor Sir Geoff Palmer (Chancellor, Heriot-Watt University): It is a great honour to speak to the Parliament today.

Scotland has historical links with slavery in Jamaica, but today, although our flags have different colours, they are the same. We are different but the same. My late, dear mother migrated from Jamaica to London in 1951 and saved £86 to pay my fare to join her in 1955. She got me a job in a shop, but she was told by the authorities that I had to go to school until I was 15 years old—I was 14 years and 11 months old.

One school rejected me—it said that I was educationally sub-normal. A secondary modern school took me, and, later in 1955, I was transferred to a local grammar school because I was good at cricket. I left school in 1958 and worked as a junior laboratory technician at a college in London. My boss, Professor Chapman, allowed me to improve my qualifications but had to help me to enter the University of Leicester, in 1961.

I left the University of Leicester in 1964, with an honours degree in botany, but the only job available was peeling potatoes in a restaurant. My potato peeling ended when Professor Anna Macleod at Heriot-Watt College offered me a PhD place in 1965, and in 1967 I gained a joint PhD from Heriot-Watt College and the University of Edinburgh. I worked in a research institute from 1968 to 1977, and I returned to Heriot-Watt University as a lecturer in 1977. It has been a privilege for me to have contributed to the science and technology of cereal grains, to have taught many gifted students and to have helped to set up the £1.3 million international centre for brewing and distilling at Heriot-Watt University in 1989.

I started my charitable work in Scotland in 1965, and I recently contributed to a video made for the

Parliament called “We are Scotland”. We are Scotland, indeed. My DNA says that I am, in part, a Viking from Shetland. Sadly, the past has given us racism, but I am honoured to be chairing various groups that are examining Scotland’s links with race, slavery and colonialism. Although we cannot change the past, we can change consequences such as racism for the better, using education.

It is a great honour for me to be Jamaica’s first honorary consul in Scotland. I must thank my mother for investing her £86 in my education. Education works. *[Applause.]*

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Professor Sir Geoff Palmer.

Business Motion

14:04

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-01312, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, which sets out a change to today's business.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees to the following revisions to the programme of business for Tuesday 21 September 2021—

after

followed by First Minister's Statement: COVID-19 Update

insert

followed by Ministerial Statement: Scottish Ambulance Service

delete

5.00 pm Decision Time

and insert

5.30 pm Decision Time—*[George Adam]*

Motion agreed to.

Topical Question Time

14:05

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is topical question time. As ever, I would like to get in as many members as possible, so succinct questions and responses would be helpful.

Gas Pricing (Wholesale)

1. **Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it has assessed the impact of the increase in wholesale gas prices on food and energy availability in Scotland, particularly ahead of winter. (S6T-00160)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): Scottish Government ministers and officials are in regular contact with the whole food and drink sector. Based on our discussions, the current assessment is that, although availability has stabilised, the choice of products has reduced. The Scottish Government will continue to maintain regular contact with the sector, including discussion of the availability of carbon dioxide, which has significant impacts on food production and animal welfare.

Security of gas supply is a reserved matter, on which the Scottish Government has no formal functions. The United Kingdom gas system is subject to regular assessments of security of supply through National Grid's twice-yearly outlook publications, the biennial European gas risk assessment and other ad hoc assessments.

The Scottish Government works closely with National Grid, as well as with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets and Scotland's gas distribution network operator, to ensure that the supplies of gas to Scottish consumers remain resilient and that Scottish circumstances and priorities are taken fully into account.

Emma Harper: As the cabinet secretary said, CO₂ is an essential component in the food supply chain. It is used in our abattoirs, to vacuum pack food products and to provide the fizz for beer, cider and soft drinks. James Withers from Scotland Food & Drink has told me that he is extremely concerned because it is estimated that Scottish pork and poultry producers have only between five and 15 days of CO₂ left. In addition, Scottish small breweries and microbreweries cannot access CO₂ supplies.

I understand that, without an urgent resolution, livestock will be likely to be backed up on farms,

which could cause animal welfare issues, and many small breweries will go out of business. Given the serious food supply chain concerns, will the cabinet secretary outline what representations the Scottish Government has made to the UK Government and the industry about the requirement to restart fertiliser production, which is essential to the whole food supply chain?

Mairi Gougeon: The member is absolutely right to raise all the concerns that she has, because the issue is critical. As she said, the risk of a shortage of carbon dioxide has major implications for food production, as well as animal welfare, because carbon dioxide is used in packaging to extend shelf life. A lack of carbon dioxide would lead to increased spoilage and waste.

On animal welfare, as Emma Harper highlighted, CO₂ is used for slaughter—the pig plant at Brechin and the poultry plant at Coupar Angus both rely on the gas for slaughter. We understand that both plants have supplies for the time being or can use alternative methods.

In the longer term, we need to find more resilient supplies of gas for our industry. I expect to speak to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs minister Victoria Prentis later today about a range of issues. Given the latest issues that we face, I will add to the matters that we will discuss a long-term and sustainable solution for the CO₂ supply.

The Presiding Officer: I would be grateful if Emma Harper and the cabinet secretary ensured that questions and answers were shorter, please.

Emma Harper: I will try to be brief. The regulator, Ofgem, caps the energy price at a maximum that suppliers can charge customers who are on their standard variable tariffs. The cap is set to rise by 12 per cent on 1 October. Energy bills for those who use prepayment meters—they are typically the most vulnerable in our society—are likely to rise, on average, to £1,309 a year. That comes on top of the UK Government's callous and cruel cut of £20 a week from universal credit.

Will the cabinet secretary outline what action the Scottish Government is taking to help to prevent fuel poverty? Will she join me in calling on the UK Government to stop penalising some of the most vulnerable people in our society—

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Harper.

Emma Harper: —during a global pandemic?

Mairi Gougeon: Again, the member is absolutely right, and I am happy to join her in that call. The cut to universal credit will only exacerbate the extreme situation that many people face right now. About a third of people live in fuel poverty and about a quarter live in extreme fuel

poverty. The issues that we are facing now will only exacerbate that situation, and the UK Government's actions will do nothing to resolve it; indeed, they will make the situation even more precarious.

By the end of this year, we will have allocated more than £1 billion since 2009 to tackle fuel poverty and improve energy efficiency, including £114 million in this year alone. In addition, we continue to fund Home Energy Scotland to provide free and impartial advice on how to reduce bills and make homes warmer and cheaper to heat. The Scottish Government will continue to do what we can, as we always do, to mitigate the worst of the cuts from the UK Government at Westminster.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): With the shortage of CO₂ required for the humane slaughter of pigs and the suspension of the Chinese licence due to Covid, Scottish pig producers are facing the perfect storm. Quality Pork Processors Ltd in Brechin is currently on a three-day week, with farmers choosing to divert their pigs to the north of England. What is the Scottish Government's position on the reinstatement of the Chinese licence to help the Brechin site to return to full capacity? Will the cabinet secretary extend the pig producers hardship fund deadline beyond 26 September?

Mairi Gougeon: I am acutely aware of the issues that the member has raised, as the QPPL plant is in my constituency. My officials have been engaging closely with QPPL to try to resolve the issues that it faces, and I have personally engaged with the company and will continue to do so. The member rightly raises the hardship fund, which was announced earlier this month. We will continue to do all that we can to support our vital pig industry.

Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP): The cabinet secretary said that she will meet the UK Government. She will be aware that the closure of one or two factories can cripple the supplies of CO₂ across the country and that the food and drink sector and the national health service absolutely rely on those supplies. Will the cabinet secretary discuss that issue with the UK Government and with the Scottish Government's food resilience group? What discussions will there be to ensure greater long-term resilience for the CO₂ supply chain?

Mairi Gougeon: I assure the member and other members across the chamber that we are working across Government on the issue. As has been highlighted in some of the questions, the impact relates to not just the food and drink sector but fuel poverty and social security. We are working across Government to do what we can to resolve some of the issues. As I said in response to Emma

Harper, this evening, I will meet the DEFRA minister Victoria Prentis to discuss a range of issues, including CO₂ and, of course, the labour shortages, which are another critical issue not just for our food and drink sector but across society in Scotland.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): We have heard about welfare issues and food shortages resulting from the CO₂ shortage. Will the minister consider intervening and prioritising CO₂ supplies for the food sector?

Mairi Gougeon: As I stated, we will do everything that we can to resolve the situation, but this is another issue on which not all the levers are within our control. I believe that the business secretary in the UK Government has been engaging with CF Industries, the fertiliser supplier, in an attempt to find a resolution to the issue. We encourage those discussions, of course, because the issue is now absolutely critical to keeping our food and drink supply chains going and keeping the food on our shelves. We will do all that we can to help.

Prison Deaths

2. Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to research stating that no recommendations to improve practice are made in nine out of 10 fatal accident inquiries into deaths in prison. (S6T-00179)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans (Keith Brown): Any death in custody is a tragedy. As I set out in Parliament during portfolio questions last week, the Scottish Government takes very seriously the issue of deaths in custody.

We have commissioned an independent review of how deaths in custody are handled. As I indicated in response to a question from Pauline McNeill last week, we will consider carefully any recommendations that the independent review makes when it reports this year, whether those relate to improving the safety of prisoners or how deaths in custody are responded to.

As Liam McArthur knows, deaths in custody are subject to a mandatory fatal accident inquiry unless the circumstances of the death have been explained through a criminal trial or other inquiry. The presiding sheriff will consider the evidence led by all parties and determine whether any reasonable precautions were identified that might have resulted in the death being avoided, or whether there were any defects in any system of working that contributed to the death. If no matters are identified at the inquiry that might realistically prevent other deaths in similar circumstances,

there will be no basis for the sheriff to make any recommendations.

In 2020-21, 61 fatal accident inquiries were held, including FAIs relating to a death in custody. Eighteen recommendations were made in eight of the inquiries that were held. Where recommendations are made, the priority is to ensure that they are acted on.

Liam McArthur: In 2018, Katie Allan and William Lindsay tragically died in Polmont. Almost three years on, the fatal accident inquiries into their deaths are still outstanding and lessons are still to be learned. However, research from the University of Glasgow shows that, even when FAIs conclude, improvements are unlikely to follow.

Two weeks ago, Jack McKenzie died in Polmont while awaiting trial. He was 20. Does the cabinet secretary still believe that the fatal accident inquiry system is working properly?

Keith Brown: As Liam McArthur knows, the fatal accident inquiry system that we now have was debated and agreed in 2016. It was subsequently considered by the Justice Committee, which looked at the issues in depth and did not recommend, for example, the introduction of mandatory time limits for fatal accident inquiries.

However, we can always look to improve the situation. We have allocated new funding to the law officers to ensure that, when they are held, FAIs can be conducted more quickly. Liam McArthur will also know that, often, other inquiries must take place prior to an FAI taking place.

We will look to make any further improvements that we can. For my part, I am more than willing to listen to any representations that are made by the Criminal Justice Committee. In the meantime, we believe that the FAI system is one that works, albeit that we should always seek to improve it.

Liam McArthur: It is not only in relation to deaths in custody that fatal accident inquiries fail—the whole system is in need of reform.

In 2019, research by the Scottish Liberal Democrats found decade-long delays to investigations. The Scottish Government and the Lord Advocate promised resources and improvements in response, but reports of decade-long delays keep on coming. Why does the cabinet secretary believe that more of the same is enough?

Keith Brown: I have just said that I believe that more has to be done. I also mentioned that additional resources were made available, and we have seen reductions in the length of inquiries. There has also been an increase in the number of inquiries over recent years. As that happens, pressures can build up, and it is up to the Scottish

Government to ensure that we look at the matter afresh. However, it is not only down to the Scottish Government—we have to listen to what parliamentary committees such as the Justice Committee, which examined the issues in depth, have to say.

We will continue to seriously consider the issue, because we know the heartbreak that it can cause—Liam McArthur mentioned some of the people concerned—when a system is delayed, albeit that the delays might be for legitimate purposes.

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): The bottom line is that fatal accident inquiries are simply taking too long to commence and too long to conclude. The average time to complete an FAI is nearly three years, which is up from two years in just one year. That is a shocking statistic.

Conservative members support the introduction of a statutory maximum timescale for fatal accident inquiries. Why does the cabinet secretary not support that?

Keith Brown: As I understand it, members of Jamie Greene's party did not support that position back in 2016, when the matter was previously discussed. Maybe there is a reason why they have changed their view, and I am happy to listen to any representations on the issue. However, Jamie Greene will also know—*[Interruption.]* If I could just finish before Mr Kerr starts shouting from a sedentary position, as he does on a regular basis.

Of course, it is the case that the—*[Interruption.]* It is the case that fatal accident inquiries are conducted by the Lord Advocate, independently of the Scottish Government. I am not aware that other parties, including the Conservative Party, want to change that. If they wish to do so, they can make such a proposal.

Where the system is not working as effectively as it could be, we and the law officers want to do all that we can to ensure that things are done as timeously as possible. We have seen improvements in recent years, partly due to the resources that have been allocated to the system.

If there are other suggestions, we should keep an open mind.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes topical questions.

Covid-19 Update

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is a statement by Nicola Sturgeon on Covid-19. The First Minister's statement will be followed by questions, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:19

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I will give an update on the latest Covid situation. As part of that, I will summarise changes to the rules on international travel, some of which will take effect tomorrow and others in early October. I will also provide an update on the development of the Covid certification scheme, ahead of further details being published later this week.

First, I will summarise today's statistics. Yesterday, 2,870 positive cases were reported, which was 11.7 per cent of all tests. Currently, 1,107 people are in hospital with Covid, which is 19 more than yesterday, and 94 people are in intensive care, which is three fewer than yesterday. Sadly, a further 18 deaths have been reported in the past 24 hours, which takes the total number of deaths registered under the daily definition to 8,396. As always, I send my condolences to everyone who has lost a loved one.

Good progress continues to be made on the vaccination programme. As of this morning, 4,160,835 people have had a first dose and 3,813,547 have had both doses. That includes 96 per cent of people aged 40 and over, 74 per cent of 30 to 39-year-olds and 62 per cent of 18 to 29-year-olds. As I indicated last week, more than three quarters of 18 to 29-year-olds have had a first dose, so the proportion in that age group who will become fully vaccinated will continue to increase. In addition, 70 per cent of 16 and 17-year-olds have now had the first jab, which is five percentage points higher than at this time last week.

Additionally, the programme of booster vaccinations is now under way, in line with the advice received from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation last week. Care home residents started to get booster jabs yesterday. From the end of September, people aged over 70 and those on the highest risk list—which was previously the shielding list—will start to get booster jabs. Notification of appointments will be by letter or from general practitioners.

Vaccinations for 12 to 15-year-olds also started this week. Such vaccinations were available at drop-in centres in six health board areas yesterday and will be available in all mainland health board areas from tomorrow. Next week, appointment

letters will be sent to all 12 to 15-year-olds who have not already been vaccinated. Parents and carers will be encouraged to accompany their children to appointments.

I again encourage all 12 to 15-year-olds, and parents or carers, to read the information about vaccination that is available online, so that an informed decision can be made about getting the vaccine. In addition, any questions or concerns can be raised and addressed with vaccinators when attending appointments. All that reflects our determination, as I stressed last week, to make sure that the programme for 12 to 15-year-olds is based on the principle of informed consent.

Last week, I indicated that we were seeing early signs that the number of new cases in Scotland might be starting to fall. I am glad to say that I am even more confident about that now. The early signs that I spoke about last week have become much firmer over the past seven days.

Members will recall that, in the week to 28 August, new cases increased by more than 80 per cent. In the week after that, the rate of increase slowed to 11 per cent, and, last week, we were able to report that cases had fallen by 12 per cent over the previous seven days. In the most recent week, which is up to 18 September, new cases have fallen further, by 31 per cent. That is, of course, a very encouraging trend. In addition, and in contrast to previous weeks, the fall in cases is spread across all age groups, with declines of more than 10 per cent in every age group.

One interesting point is that the steepest fall in cases has been in the 20 to 24 age group, with cases having fallen by around three quarters in the past three weeks. It is always hard to clearly identify cause and effect for changes like that—multiple factors might well make a difference—but it is worth noting that a significant proportion of people in that age group received their second dose of the vaccine during August and early September. It is likely that we are now seeing the positive impact of vaccination in that age group, as we have seen in older age groups previously.

In any event, I am very grateful to everyone—organisations, businesses and individuals—who has taken extra care in recent weeks to try to halt and then reverse the spike in cases. It seems that those efforts are making a significant difference. Of course, it is important to point out that, despite that welcome improvement, the position continues to be fragile. New cases remain high—higher than we would want them to be—and they are still above the previous peak in early July.

In addition, universities have been returning for the new academic year, and it may be too early for any impact from that to be evident in the data—although, as I set out last week, universities,

colleges and students themselves have been working hard to reduce the risks of transmission on campus and in student accommodation. More generally, as we move into autumn and winter, there continues to be a risk—as there is in all countries—that cases will rise again, and we must do all that we can to guard against and seek to mitigate that risk as much as we can.

The national health service is, of course, already under considerable pressure. As I have indicated many times before, vaccination has significantly weakened the link between new cases and serious harm to health, but it has not broken that link, neither here nor in any country. The recent surge in cases has caused a rise in hospitalisations. On 20 August, there were 312 people in our hospitals with Covid. Today, as I have just reported, the figure is 1,107. The number of people in intensive care has also increased, from 34 on 20 August to 94 today.

As we know from past experience, fluctuations in the number of people in hospital tend to lag behind—by around two weeks—any rise or fall in the number of new cases. We would hope, therefore, that the recent fall in cases will, over the next couple of weeks, start to ease the pressure that Covid is placing on the NHS.

Indeed, there is already some evidence that the rise in hospital occupancy is beginning to level off. Today's figure of 1,107 people in hospital with Covid is an increase of 43 from last week, but in the previous week, the increase was 259. Given that cases have been falling for more than a week now, we would hope to see a fall in Covid-related hospital occupancy soon. That said, admissions and occupancy remain high, and the need to avoid that pressure intensifying is the reason—or, at least, one of the reasons—why we need to keep cases on a downward track.

In addition—it is important to keep on stressing this point—looking only at hospitalisations does not take account of the harm that Covid does in other ways, for example through long Covid. The virus, although it is again retreating somewhat, is still causing health harm to a significant number of people. In addition, NHS staff are dealing with a large number of Covid cases at the same time as they are gearing up for winter and dealing with the backlog that has built up during the pandemic.

As the chief medical officer highlighted over the weekend, that level of activity is exhausting for those who work in the health service, especially when it follows on from everything that has been asked of them since March last year. Later, I will stress again the need for us all, as individuals, to do what we can to get and keep the virus under control. However, I emphasise that when we do that, we are not simply protecting ourselves and others from Covid, although that is important. We

are also helping those who work so hard in the national health service, and we are protecting their capacity to provide care and treatment to anyone who needs it. That should provide us all with an extra incentive—if one is needed—to get vaccinated, to test regularly and to keep complying with all the measures that are necessary for us to get and keep the virus under control.

Cabinet secretaries are continuing to engage on all those aspects with representatives from business, the public sector and wider civic society. I am, once again, grateful to all businesses and organisations for all the efforts that are being made to follow and promote measures such as the wearing of face coverings, good ventilation and, wherever possible, continued home working. Those efforts are making a difference—we can see that in the most recent data—so please, let us all stick with them for the period ahead.

We are also continuing to assess the appropriateness and effectiveness of measures on international travel, which is the first of the two substantive issues on which I will update Parliament today. Last week, the United Kingdom and Scottish Governments confirmed that, from 4 am tomorrow, eight countries will be removed from the red list, including Turkey, Egypt and the Maldives. Those countries will move on to the amber list, which means that fully vaccinated travellers will not need to self-isolate when they return from there. However, people who are 18 or over and who have not been fully vaccinated will still need to isolate for 10 days.

We also confirmed that, from 4 October, the range of countries that is covered by the eligible vaccinated traveller programme will be expanded. At the moment, for the purposes of travel regulations, someone is recognised as vaccinated only if the vaccination took place in the United Kingdom, the USA or a country that is a member of the European Union or the European Free Trade Association. However, from 4 October, 17 countries, including Canada, Australia, Israel and New Zealand, will be added to the list of countries that are recognised in that way. The change recognises the reliable standards of vaccination certification that apply in those countries, and it will make it easier for people who have been fully vaccinated in those countries to travel to and from Scotland.

From 4 October, we will amend the traffic light system for international travel. Again, that is consistent with changes that are being made by the UK Government. In effect, the green and amber lists are being merged so that, from 4 October, there will be only two categories of country: those on the red list and all other countries. The amber list rules will apply to all countries that are not on the red list. As I

mentioned earlier, that means that only people who have not been fully vaccinated and are over 18 will require to self-isolate on returning from those countries.

The UK Government has announced that it intends to change the requirements on taking tests before and after international travel for people travelling to and from England. Scotland, like Wales and Northern Ireland, has not yet taken a final decision on that, but we will do so within the next couple of days. We have concerns about easing the requirements on tests because we still need to guard against new variants of the virus being imported into the country and we need to have a way of identifying quickly if a new variant does enter the country. Testing, both before someone's departure for Scotland and soon after their arrival here, can help us to do that. Without it, we will be much less able to pick up the presence of new variants.

We believe that the polymerase chain reaction tests and other highly sensitive tests that are required for testing are more effective at guarding against the risk of new variants than alternative tests. They are more likely to identify positive tests than most lateral flow tests, although lateral flow devices are, of course, valuable, and PCR tests make it easier for new variants to be sequenced and identified.

On the other hand, we fully understand and agree with the desirability, wherever possible, of adopting a four-nations approach to travel restrictions. However difficult it might be for us, we must recognise the reality that, if Scotland adopts more stringent requirements than England, people living in Scotland who want to go abroad might decide to fly from airports in England. In those circumstances, we could face the economic cost of stricter rules without gaining enough public health benefit to justify the cost. We must weigh up the public health risks of making the change—I will discuss those further with the chief medical officer—with the pragmatic considerations that I have just set out and the understandable concerns of the travel industry. It is not an easy decision, and it will have implications either way. As I indicated earlier, we will confirm our decision in the next day or so.

The final issue that I want to provide an update on is the Covid certification scheme. Further details of the scheme will be published later this week, but I will provide some information now.

Everyone under the age of 18 will be exempt from the requirement to provide proof of vaccination, as will people who are taking part in vaccine trials, the small number—and it is a very small number—of individuals who cannot be vaccinated for medical reasons and people who

work at or perform in a venue that is subject to certification.

The scheme will come into force at 5 am on Friday 1 October. As previously indicated, it will apply to nightclubs and similar venues, live indoor unseated events of more than 500 people, live outdoor unseated events of more than 4,000 people and any event of more than 10,000 people.

In recent days, we have been working to finalise the definition of nightclubs and similar settings. Our intention is that certification will be required for any venue that meets all the following conditions: it is open between midnight and 5 am; it serves alcohol after midnight; it provides live or recorded music for dancing; and it has a designated space, which is in use, where dancing is permitted. I stress that certification will be required only if all four factors apply.

Detailed draft guidance will be published ahead of the regulations and will clearly set out what each sector needs to do. A pragmatic and sensible approach will be taken to each piece of guidance. In legal terms, venues will be required to take "all reasonable measures" to implement the scheme. In plain terms, that boils down to using common sense.

For example, a venue that has a dance floor operating after midnight and that meets the other criteria that I outlined will have to operate the certification scheme. However, it will not need to check people who come in for a pub lunch 12 hours earlier. That clearly would not be reasonable; it would be reasonable to check customers as they arrived in the evening. That is what we mean by common sense. A pragmatic approach will be encouraged, so that businesses can make sensible judgements.

Regarding other practicalities, the NHS Covid status app will be available for downloading from 30 September. The app will provide a digital record of a user's vaccination status, including a quick response code for each vaccination that a person has received. Each of us can already request a paper copy of our vaccination record, which has specific features to prevent it from being forged. That paper copy also provides a QR code, so anyone who does not want to use the app will be able to obtain and use a paper copy.

Once the scheme is launched, anyone going to a venue or event that requires certification will be required, if asked, to show their vaccination record. Venue staff will either scan or visually check the QR code. The NHS Scotland Covid check app that venues can use is already available for download. At a venue such as a nightclub, or at a relatively small event, we expect that it will be possible to check the vaccination certificates of everyone in attendance. At larger

events, organisers will be expected to carry out a reasonable number of checks. We are working with businesses and environmental health officers to provide specific advice and guidance on the level of checks that should be considered both reasonable and effective to fulfil the public health objective of certification.

I hope that that information, together with the details to be published shortly, will provide further clarity on how the scheme will operate. I stress that, even after the scheme has started, we will keep the operational details under review and be prepared to make changes in the light of experience and as upgrades and improvements are made to the operation of the app. We consider it to be an important part of our overall approach to controlling the virus to have a certification scheme in operation soon.

As I have underlined, the position remains fragile despite the recent fall in cases. The NHS is under sustained pressure and there is a risk that cases will rise again as we enter winter. We view a vaccination certification scheme as a proportionate measure that will play a part in helping to reduce transmission risks and encourage uptake of the vaccine while keeping nightclubs and large events open for business. I note that the Welsh Government has decided to introduce a Covid certification scheme that is similar to the one that is proposed in Scotland.

Let me close by emphasising again the steps that we can all take to get and keep the virus under control. First, please get vaccinated if you are eligible and have not yet done so. That remains the single most important thing that any of us can do. Secondly, please test regularly with lateral flow devices, which can be ordered through the NHS Inform website or collected from a local test site or pharmacy. If you test positive, or if you are identified as a close contact or have symptoms of the virus, please self-isolate and book a PCR test.

Thirdly, please comply with the mitigations that are still in place. Wear face coverings in indoor public places such as shops, on public transport and when moving around in hospitality settings. Meet outdoors as much as possible. I know that that will get harder for us as we move into autumn and winter, but outdoor meetings remain safer. When meeting indoors, open windows wherever possible. Try to keep a safe distance from people from other households, especially when indoors. Wash your hands and surfaces thoroughly.

All of that makes a difference and, as we can see from the recent data, it is working. So, please, stick with it to get cases down even further.

The Presiding Officer: The First Minister will now take questions on the issues raised in her

statement. I intend to allow around 40 minutes for questions, after which we will move on to the next item of business. Members who wish to ask a question should press their request-to-speak button.

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): The SNP Government's vaccination passport scheme, which we opposed, comes into force next week, but the First Minister is still finalising the guidance. Businesses are worried about the impact that the scheme will have on them. More than 40 business groups wrote to the Government yesterday with a warning about its testing plan. Despite promises of a reset, it is clear that jobs and businesses are still not the priority for this Government.

However, it is the spiralling crisis in our NHS that I want to focus on today. The shocking ambulance waiting times are risking lives, and today's stark figures reveal the worst accident and emergency waiting times on record. The number of patients waiting more than half a day to be seen has almost doubled since last week. That is unbelievable. Half of the patients at Scotland's flagship hospital—the Queen Elizabeth in Glasgow—are waiting for more than the target time of four hours.

Behind every one of the appalling statistics are patients and their families who are suffering, but the First Minister does not think that this is a crisis. Somehow, she will not admit the reality and say that word. She should wake up. Scotland's NHS is at breaking point. This is a crisis. She should speak to the brave staff on the front line and try to tell us that it is not a crisis. The Royal College of Emergency Medicine has said today that we are 1,000 acute beds short.

We have previously offered solutions to increase capacity, but the Government has delayed instead of acting. Warnings have gone ignored not just for weeks but for years. This cannot just be blamed on Covid, and the NHS recovery plan is not cutting it; since it was published, things have got worse. My colleagues are doing all that they can. Nurses, doctors and paramedics are all working flat out, but they are overwhelmed.

Does the First Minister agree that it is the system that is failing us on the front line? When will she publish a real plan to support the NHS through what could be the worst winter ever?

The First Minister: Let me run through all those points in turn. Before I come to the position in the NHS, I note that the member raised issues to do with vaccination passports and testing, so I will address those briefly.

The situation with vaccination passports is as I have set out. We think that their introduction is a proportionate measure ahead of the winter period

to try to help us to get transmission down and keep it down, to drive up even further the already high vaccination uptake rates, and to do all that while keeping businesses such as nightclubs and large events open for business rather than having them face again this winter the risk of closure that they faced last winter. I think that that is a reasonable thing to do.

We are working closely with business on the definitions that will apply, in order that we hear its concerns and can address them as far as possible. I think that that is the right, the proper and, indeed, the responsible thing to do. The position in England is not as planned as that. The Prime Minister said in terms last week that he reserves the right to come back and introduce such a scheme at any point. We think that it is better to give the clear intention and do the work now to support the businesses that will be required to implement the scheme.

On testing for those who travel to Scotland from other countries and testing when people arrive here from other countries, I have tried today to set out frankly the very difficult consideration that arises. On the one hand, we have real concerns—the chief medical officer has communicated to me very real concerns—about removing the requirement for pre-departure testing and the risk that that would create of us importing the variants. On the other hand, the travel industry has concerns about not having an aligned position across the UK. That is the very real consideration that we are trying to weigh up, and we will come to a decision on it, as I said, over the next two days.

On NHS pressures, I think that I said last week—and I say it again today—that the NHS is facing crisis conditions as a result of a global pandemic. It is facing crisis conditions here in Scotland and it is facing crisis conditions in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The point that I will continue to make is that the people who are working hard across our NHS—people are working incredibly hard, including, I know, the member—do not need me to worry about what we call it; they need the Government to take the action and provide the support to those on the front line in order to help them to deal with that pressure.

That is exactly what we are doing through funding, increases in capacity and changes in how the NHS is seeing patients in order to free up capacity. The health secretary will set out later this afternoon the actions that we are taking to support the Scottish Ambulance Service with the difficult job that it is doing.

I believe that this winter will be the hardest that the NHS has faced in the memory of any of us. My job is therefore, each and every day, with my colleagues across the Government, to support

those who are working at the front line—and that is exactly what we will do.

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): I start by sending my condolences to all who have lost a loved one through Covid. Cases remain worryingly high. Covid wards are inundated and, sadly, every day, many of our fellow citizens are still losing their lives to the virus.

Today, we have heard that A and E waiting times are again the worst on record. That is linked to the ambulance crisis. In Glasgow, at the flagship Queen Elizabeth university hospital, far fewer than half of A and E patients were seen within four hours. That is a national scandal and tragedy, but the First Minister should not use the pandemic as cover for Government failure. I accept that the pandemic has had a negative impact, but there were underlying challenges and failures that predated Covid-19. For months, the Government was warned. For months, it denied it. It took the tragedy of two families going to a newspaper for the Government to act. All the while, patients and their families have been, and continue to be, failed. How long will it take to fix the ambulance crisis so that no family is waiting longer than is necessary?

Today, at long last, we have heard more details of the vaccination passport scheme. There are still big gaps in the detail, limited engagement with the businesses that are affected and limited published evidence on the difference that it will make. The First Minister wants to pretend that the scheme is the same as the one used by the Welsh Government. That is, at best, disingenuous. The Welsh scheme involves either a vaccination or a negative test. I repeat to the First Minister that making sure that someone who is going into a venue is Covid negative is more important than whether they have had a vaccine. People can still get the virus and spread the virus even though they have been vaccinated.

The Welsh First Minister said that using a vaccination passport alone raises a series of “ethical, legal and technical” questions—questions that the Scottish First Minister has still not answered. When will the Government finally listen to the World Health Organization, and when will it finally understand that our route out of the pandemic is—yes—partly through vaccination but fundamentally through testing and tracing, on both of which the Government has woefully failed throughout the pandemic?

The First Minister: I will come to NHS pressures in a moment.

On vaccine certification, Anas Sarwar is being deeply disingenuous and opportunistic, and he moves the goalposts at every turn. A few weeks ago, Anas Sarwar was not asking us to introduce

a scheme involving either proof of vaccination or a negative lateral flow device test. He was asking only for a negative test, not for proof of vaccination.

At this stage, we do not intend to include a negative test, for all the reasons that have been set out. Although LFD tests are very important, they rely on self-reporting. At this stage, we consider that that would not be the best approach. It would also undermine one of the central objectives of the certification scheme, which is to drive up vaccination uptake rates. That is the only difference from the scheme that is being proposed in Wales. It applies to exactly the same venues and in exactly the same way.

Anas Sarwar does not want the people who are going to events or nightclubs to have the protection of such a certification scheme but, apparently, people who are going to attend the Labour Party conference are to have such a scheme, because it is important that their health gets protected. When Anas Sarwar decides to have a bit of principle or consistency on the matter, perhaps he will be able to come to the chamber and expect to be taken seriously in any way, shape or form.

On the very important issue of NHS pressures, I say to Anas Sarwar that, of course, there were significant pressures on our national health service before the pandemic but, again, anybody who stands in the chamber and suggests that the pandemic is not the most significant factor impacting on our NHS right now—the most significant factor that has impacted on it in years, if not decades—lacks credibility.

We need to support our NHS through all the ways that we are doing that, including increased funding, the work to increase capacity and the work to reform patient flows through our NHS so that we reduce the pressure on A and E and on our Ambulance Service. All that is the work that we are focusing on, with real action, real solutions and real dedication. We will continue to do that each and every day to support those working on the front line.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I am grateful that the First Minister answered my call to exempt people who are under the age of 18 from the use of Covid identification cards. However, arbitrary distinctions—details of which were released to Parliament today—that will lead to commercial unfairness between businesses are being made.

There are several questions. For example, what precisely does the First Minister expect by way of spot checks at a 50,000-person sporting event? Furthermore, staff are supposed to either scan or visually check QR codes. Unless the bouncer is

RoboCop, how can venues guard against fraud through visual checking? Can the First Minister not see that she is spending time and money on creating a blizzard of new random rules for business while, at the same time, eroding the fundamental human right to medical privacy?

The First Minister: No, I cannot. People have a right to expect their Government to do everything that is reasonable and proportionate to protect them from the risk of Covid over the winter and to protect our NHS from the risk of Covid, and to do all that while keeping businesses open and trading. As countries across Europe are finding out—often through going much further than we propose to go—vaccination certification can play a big part in that. It is also preferable to the alternatives.

Let me turn to the detailed points. We have always indicated that exemption for under-18s would be likely. The impact on different sectors is exactly why we are taking care with definitions. The definitions of a nightclub and similar settings are to try to avoid, for example, pubs that operate in the same way as nightclubs not having to check certification, which might damage nightclubs that are subject to checking certification. We are rightly and properly taking time to get the definitions right.

Similarly, we are making sure that there is proportionality in relation to spot checks, so that we fulfil the two objectives of not putting undue pressure on events while making sure that spot checks and the number of checks that are done fulfil the public health objective. The amount of spot checks will not be the same in every size and shape of event, so those details continue to be finalised as we engage and discuss with businesses.

On fraud, the paper copy has anti-fraud and anti-forgery measures built into it. The QR code is a significant part of that. It is not helpful for members to continue to suggest wrongly, as some have, that vaccination certificates can be forged or fraudulently produced.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): The First Minister said that there have been discussions with businesses. Have there been specific discussions with football and licensed trade representatives?

The First Minister: There have been discussions with licensed trade representatives, football organisations and particular football clubs. The feedback from all those discussions has been very helpful in finalising definitions. Although I do not expect that everybody will be satisfied with the fine definitions, it is important that we achieve broad consensus on as many of the issues as possible. We will continue with that up to the introduction of the scheme and—of course—after

its introduction. As I said earlier, we will be prepared to adapt, should experience suggest that that is necessary.

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): As the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care found out last week, pride comes before a fall. Given the scale of opposition from business and the public to the Government's ill-conceived and unworkable Covid passports, why will the First Minister not swallow her pride and scrap the scheme?

The First Minister: On vaccination passports, it has been said:

"I really do defend these in principle ... I mean, if you think about ... where we were last September ... we would have been able",

with certification,

"to keep open businesses that had been forced to close",

which

"would've been a total game changer, a lifesaver, last year. And so I think that they're an important part of our repertoire, and it's great that loads of events have been working to use them. People have been making the system work."

Those are the words, from just last week, of Boris Johnson, the Prime Minister.

We are being straight with people in saying that we are introducing vaccination passports because we think that they can make a difference, and we are doing the work to make the system operational. That is preferable to keeping businesses hanging on and saying, "Maybe we will introduce them and maybe we won't," as Craig Hoy's colleagues south of the border are doing.

Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): What advice and support are available to small businesses and community organisations on introduction of ventilation systems to allow, where it is practicable, a return to work and community groups?

The First Minister: Ventilation is a really important part of what we are doing. We have made funding available to parts of the public sector, and ventilation guidance has been made available to businesses. We have also established a ventilation expert group to give us further recommendations and advice. One of the things that we will consider over the coming days is whether funding can and should be made available to help businesses to make necessary improvements in ventilation. We will set out more detail on that in due course.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I am sure that the First Minister agrees that testing and contact tracing remains an essential tool for suppressing the spread of the virus.

In the past few weeks, the number of completed contact tracing cases has dropped, and the proportion of cases being completed within 72 hours has been well below the World Health Organization's required standard of 80 per cent. The average number of contacts per case has dropped to 1.1—basically, test and protect is contacting only the positive case, and none of the person's close contacts.

Does the First Minister think that that is good enough? If not, what additional resources will she provide to support the hard-working staff of the test and protect programme?

The First Minister: I and the Government will continue to do everything that is possible and appropriate to support the hard-working staff of test and protect.

We see a system that has been under pressure, but in which performance is improving. For example, the finalised data for the week up to 5 September show that 83 per cent of cases were completed—the provisional data had suggested that the rate was just 55 per cent. I think that we will see data for the most recent week tomorrow. More than 70 per cent of cases were closed within 72 hours, which is the proxy for the WHO standard. We need to get that amount higher; I hope that it will be higher in the figures that will be published later this week and finalised next week.

The service is delivering well for people across the country and is one of the measures that mean that we are now seeing case numbers declining—and declining quite rapidly. I take the opportunity to pay tribute to the people who are working in test and protect across the country.

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): What steps are being taken to engage with minority groups and religious bodies on maximising the uptake of Covid vaccination in low-uptake groups and among people who have yet to come forward?

The First Minister: Uptake rates across all groups in society are high—much higher than we anticipated at the start of the programme. That said, uptake rates vary among groups and we have known all along that we need to target particular groups if we are to get uptake levels as high as we want them to be. People in our ethnic minority communities are certainly in that category.

A range of steps are being taken, including outreach to ethnic minority communities and vaccination clinics in places of worship. Glasgow central mosque, in my constituency, has been a vaccination site for some time; I know that that has helped to get overall uptake rates across Glasgow high, especially in certain communities.

We will continue, even with uptake levels being as high as they are, to make sure that we go after everybody we can go after, and we will continue to encourage people who have not already taken up the opportunity for vaccination to do so as soon as possible.

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): We went into this public health crisis with a pre-existing mental health crisis. An obvious solution would be to have more people who are familiar with recognising mental health issues and providing early support. Recent mental health stats make for grim reading. Almost 1,700 children have been waiting more than a year to start treatment, and the Royal College of Psychiatrists has warned that the number of child and adolescent mental health psychiatrists has fallen in the past year. There is a struggle to recruit people in West Lothian, where waiting times have spiralled—from being a year to being open ended. Does the First Minister agree that people must receive support before they reach crisis point? If so, what is being done now to provide support?

The First Minister: Yes, I agree with that. We saw a significant increase in demand for mental health services before the pandemic, and we have seen a significant increase during the pandemic. That is partly positive, because the stigma that is associated with mental health is much lower than it was previously, although that puts intense pressure on services.

Before the pandemic we were, of course, reforming and redesigning mental health services particularly for children and adolescents, with the creation of community wellbeing services and provision of counsellors in schools, for example, to ensure that services are available more quickly before crisis points are reached. That work continues.

There has been an increase in the number of people working in mental health services—in particular, in CAMHS—which has accompanied the rise in demand. However, I do not underestimate the recruitment pressures that exist in many parts of the national health service—and, indeed, in many parts of society and our economy. We have committed to increasing mental health funding over the current session of Parliament, but the initial increase in funding is partly to clear some of the historical waiting times, particularly for children and adolescents.

That is an important strand of work that has significant priority, because we know that the pandemic has intensified the impact on people's mental health. That means that we are required to ensure that services are supported to respond appropriately.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I am heartened by the roll-out of vaccine booster doses, which will greatly reduce the vulnerability of older people to Covid-19 this winter. Sadly, however, anti-vaxxers, with an increasingly hysterical tone and ever more ludicrous accusations, continue to denounce the vaccination programme and all associated with it. For those in that group who are prepared to listen, can the First Minister please advise how many lives have been saved so far in Scotland thanks to the vaccine roll-out?

The First Minister: It is not easy—in fact, it may not even be possible—to put a number on the lives that have been saved because of vaccination, but there is no doubt in my mind that that number is significant. We see in the breaking of the link between cases and the numbers in hospital and dying—although both numbers are still higher than we would want them to be—that vaccines are preventing people from becoming seriously ill and are undoubtedly preventing people from dying. That is beyond any argument or doubt.

I say to people who are genuinely worried about vaccination, perhaps because they have read some of the misinformation that some have chosen to circulate, that they should think about it, please. They should go to a clinic, speak to a vaccinator, raise their concerns, have those concerns addressed, and then get vaccinated, please. The vaccines are safe and incredibly effective in saving lives and preventing illness. Getting vaccinated is the single most important thing that any of us can do to protect ourselves and others.

I have nothing but contempt for those who knowingly spread misinformation about vaccines. People who do that are not only putting themselves at risk; they are putting others and the country as a whole at risk. I hope that anybody in that category will think long and hard about the great disservice that they are doing to everybody in Scotland.

Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP): On the important issue of booster doses of the Covid vaccine for the JCVI priority groups and the tie-in with the winter flu vaccine, will the First Minister clarify when my Cowdenbeath constituents can expect to be informed of the timing and location for the booster vaccine and the flu vaccine, and how they will be informed?

The First Minister: That will be done partly in relation to age, as in the initial programme. The booster programme for older people in care homes started yesterday. As I said in my statement, boosters for those in the over-70 age group will start at the end of September. People will be notified either by letter or directly by their

GP, as was the case in the original programme. Letters will begin to go out and there will be notifications from GPs over the next few weeks. The approach will be similar for other age groups.

An important point that I ask people to remember is that the JCVI, amidst all of its other recommendations around the booster programme, recommended a gap of six months between a person's second vaccination and the booster vaccination. In my case, that would mean that I would not be eligible for a booster for some weeks yet.

The timing will be in line with advice and the order of priority, which is age and condition based. People will be notified in a way that is similar to how they were notified for the first and second doses of the vaccine.

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): The First Minister indicated that she is yet to make a final decision on whether PCR tests for fully vaccinated people entering the country from non-red list countries will still be required. If the decision is made to change testing requirements for international travel, will the First Minister commit to presenting members with strong epidemiological evidence to support such a change, given the danger posed by new variants, and will she confirm the timescale for the Scottish Government's decision?

The First Minister: As I said in my statement, we aim to make the decision over the next day or so because we understand how important it is for the travel industry and for people who are travelling. It is a really difficult decision. I will be frank: my preference would be for the requirement not to be dropped—at least not immediately—by any of the Governments in the UK. However, the UK Government—as is its right—has decided to drop the requirement for England, which inevitably raises questions for us.

That does not take away the health concerns that we have about increasing the risk of importing new variants. The testing requirement for people coming into the country is our best line of defence against that. However, the changing of requirements for England raises all the issues that arise when we do not have a four-nations, aligned approach. Some travellers to and from Scotland will choose to use airports elsewhere in the UK, which will have implications while perhaps taking away the public health benefit that such testing offers.

It is not an easy decision. We are trying to weigh up the considerations as carefully and frankly as possible. We will set out our decision in the next couple of days.

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): Seafarers have played a vital role as key workers

throughout the pandemic by maintaining essential supply chains. Many of them had to wait for their first vaccination, due to being overseas. Many seafarers seeking their second dose have been turned away from drop-in centres on the basis of being short of the eight-week window, if only by a few days. One of my constituents had to return to work at sea without a second dose yesterday, even though he was scheduled to receive it tomorrow. Vaccinators have said on multiple occasions that no exceptions will be made for seafarers. Will the First Minister raise the problem with health boards to bring about a resolution?

The First Minister: Yes, we will raise the issue with health boards—that may have already been done. Health boards should be vaccinating seafarers. It is important to make the general point that the minimum recommended gap between first and second doses is eight weeks. That has been subject to debate, discussion and controversy over the past few months. However, the data and the evidence are now showing us that the eight-week gap has helped us to prolong the protection of vaccines in a way that a shorter gap might not have done.

There needs to be flexibility. In the situation where a seafarer is going back to sea, as long as the gap is within the guidance for the particular vaccine, flexibility should be shown in a pragmatic and sensible way. I will ensure that the issue is raised with health boards so that they know to offer that flexibility.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): Defining a nightclub as somewhere serving alcohol after midnight, with music and a space where people may dance, runs the risk of catching pubs, bars and perhaps even restaurants that would not consider themselves to be night clubs. With that in mind, will the First Minister clarify what she means by “larger” and whether it will be defined? Based on what she said in her statement, it strikes me that some of those smaller venues, which do not consider themselves to be night clubs, will have to check everyone, whereas larger venues, which consider themselves to be night clubs, will simply have to carry out spot checks. Can the First Minister clarify that point?

The First Minister: We would expect night clubs to do checks on everyone who enters them. We are talking about spot checks for events—rather than venues—that are significantly bigger and where there may be thousands or at least several hundred people in attendance.

The issue of definitions is important, but if we do not have a definition of the type that I have set out, some venues may end up operating almost as nightclubs but without the need for the certification that nightclubs will need. We are trying to avoid

market displacement, which is an important issue for nightclubs.

Let me stress that I set out four criteria for such a venue. A pub that is not a nightclub would have to meet all four of those criteria to be subject to the certification requirement. That is the best, most reasonable and most proportionate way of proceeding, and it ensures that nightclubs, in particular, are not disadvantaged, because some pubs can operate in an analogous way to them without the same requirements that they will be under. We will continue to discuss, as we have been doing, all the detail of that with the affected sectors.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): Can the First Minister advise on updates to guidance on contact tracing following positive cases in schools and registered childcare settings?

The First Minister: Test and protect is responsible for the contact tracing that arises out of positive cases in schools. As I set out in my statement last week, I think, there are two categories. There are higher-risk contacts where the young person or their parents will be notified and asked to self-isolate pending a PCR test. Test and protect will judge whether somebody is a high-risk contact. Examples of situations that would fall into that category are where there has been an overnight stay or very close contact, or where siblings are involved.

For lower-risk contacts, letters will be sent when positive cases are identified. There will not be a request to self-isolate pending a PCR test, but advice will be given. A key part of that advice will be a recommendation for the young person, teacher or member of school staff to do an LFD test before they next go back to school.

We have made sure that that is as clear as possible for parents, young people and school staff, but it is driven by test and protect and the work that it does.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Records show that deaths from Covid-19 in Stranraer east are almost four times higher than in the rest of Dumfries and Galloway and significantly higher than the Scottish average. The prevalence of poor lung health in the area may be one of the contributing factors. The BREATH—Border and regions airways training hub—project currently carries out fantastic work in the south-west of Scotland. Will the First Minister commit to revisiting my previous requests for establishing in Stranraer a centre for excellence for lung health alongside that?

The First Minister: I am happy consider that. There will be variations in case rates and, unfortunately, numbers of people dying in different

parts of the country. It is not yet fully understood why that is the case, but I am sure that, for some time to come, there will be a lot of inquiry and investigation into it. It is also the case that Covid has underlined the need for other services in particular parts of the country, so I will give consideration to that in the context of the learning in relation to the member's constituency.

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee City West) (SNP): The First Minister will be aware that some unvaccinated people have expressed concern about the potential to catch and transmit Covid-19 after having been vaccinated and have cited that as a reason for their hesitancy. Can the First Minister offer any further assurances to those who may not yet have taken up the offer of a vaccination that not only protects them but helps to protect others, including their loved ones?

The First Minister: The evidence and data are clear and become clearer all the time. It is absolutely the case that vaccination does not eradicate the risk of transmission—of somebody getting the virus or passing on the virus—but it reduces that risk significantly. The data is very clear and the figures in relation to the weakened link between cases and hospitalisations show that being vaccinated significantly reduces somebody's risk, if they get the virus, of becoming seriously ill or dying from it. On both those counts, vaccination is very important and worth while.

Vaccination is literally the most important thing that any of us can do to protect ourselves and those around us. For anybody who has not yet done it, please think again. Ask any questions and raise any concerns that you have, and then please get jagged, because it is really important for you and for others.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): Eighty thousand positive Covid cases have been recorded among children aged 14 and under since the beginning of the pandemic, and 40,000 of those have been recorded in the past month. Why were some health boards, including NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, unable to provide drop-in vaccinations for 12 to 15-year-olds this Monday when other health boards were able to do so?

The First Minister: Six health boards started drop-in clinics for 12 to 15-year-olds yesterday, and all mainland health boards will have drop-in clinics operational by tomorrow. The island boards will, as they did with the main programme, go about things slightly differently because of their smaller and often more sparse populations.

The health boards that did not start yesterday have taken a bit more time to make sure that the vaccinators have the information that they need and are prepared, for example, to answer any questions that will help children and their parents

or carers to arrive at informed consent, which is important. If a health board felt that it needed to do that, I understand why. However, across all mainland Scotland, drop-in clinics will be operational for that age group from tomorrow, and I would encourage everybody in that age group and their parents or carers to read all the information, ask any questions and get vaccinated.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): There remain some people in clinically vulnerable or shielding groups who are still worried about getting the vaccine. We know that the vaccine does not cause a Covid infection but helps to build up immunity to the virus. Can the First Minister outline what specific, targeted action is being taken to support clinically vulnerable people to go and get their vaccine? Will she join me in reassuring everyone that the Covid-19 vaccine is safe?

The First Minister: First, it is important for all of us to be clear and to take every opportunity to reassure people that vaccines do not cause Covid infection—vaccines help to protect against Covid infection. We know—again, the data shows this—that for people who are particularly clinically vulnerable, a first dose of the vaccine offers protection, just as it does to somebody who is not clinically vulnerable.

We see high uptake rates among the highly clinically vulnerable group, which used to be referred to as the shielding group. I think that uptake rates in that group here are higher than those in other parts of the United Kingdom. However, we continue, as we do across all population groups, to try to boost the levels of vaccination up as far as possible. My message to anybody who has a clinical vulnerability is that it is important for everybody to get vaccinated, but it is perhaps even more so for them, because it provides them with that important protection against Covid.

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): I have been contacted by a student who attends the University of Dundee. She attends the library on campus and has to wear a face mask, even though she is more than 1m away from others. She then leaves the library and goes to the student union—still on campus—with the same people, but no face coverings are required. Her question to the First Minister is, where is the logic and the science behind that rule?

The First Minister: I think that most people understand that pragmatic and practical decisions have to be taken around the circumstances in which face coverings are worn and not worn, but the general rule is that we encourage people to wear face coverings in indoor places, and the law requires it in certain indoor places. For hospitality places, which would include student unions, for

example, it is a requirement to wear a face covering while moving around.

One of the pragmatic decisions is that, for obvious reasons, it is not reasonable to expect somebody to wear a face covering when they are sitting down in hospitality premises and perhaps eating or drinking. However, when they are moving around—entering or leaving, or going to the toilet, for example—we then ask people to wear face coverings. I know that that is inconvenient for everybody, but it is one of the basic and relatively simple ways in which we can all protect ourselves and each other. I would appeal to all members to take the time and make the effort to encourage constituents to take every reasonable opportunity to do that as part of the overall protection against the virus. It is, we hope, one of the things that will help us to keep cases on a downward track.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): It is encouraging to hear that 12 to 15-year-olds across mainland Scotland will be permitted to attend vaccination clinics as of tomorrow to receive their first jab. However, other parts of the UK are promoting vaccinations in schools themselves, which appears to be a sensible method of getting most young people rapidly vaccinated. Will the First Minister consider consulting health boards, including NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, to see whether it is practical to introduce vaccinations in schools in a similar way to BCG and HPV vaccination programmes?

The First Minister: We are already in discussions about that, as I set out last week in the chamber. First, drop-in clinics are the quickest and easiest ways for young people in the age group concerned to get vaccinated.

Secondly, any young person who does not take up that opportunity will be sent a letter next week with an appointment. Asking a young person to go to an appointment in a clinic is the quickest and easiest way to get informed consent, because it is easier for their parent or carer to go with them.

Thirdly, we will do school-based vaccination to ensure that anybody who has not managed to take up one of the other opportunities gets an opportunity in a school setting. That might be in a school or at a hub around school premises. All of that is part of the efforts that are under way and will intensify in the coming weeks to vaccinate as many 12 to 15-year-olds as possible.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the First Minister's statement.

Emma Harper: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I apologise that, when asking my question about vaccination, I neglected to mention that I am still a registered nurse and that I am part of NHS Dumfries and Galloway's vaccination team.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Harper. That will be recorded.

Scottish Ambulance Service

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Members may be aware that some details of the proposed ministerial statement on the Scottish Ambulance Service appear to have been made public via the media prior to being announced to the Parliament. That is extremely disappointing.

I make it clear that the expectation that statements will be made to the Parliament is about demonstrating respect for the Parliament. I consider the matter to be very serious. Given that I cannot be sure that all members will have seen the coverage, I will in this instance allow the statement to be made. However, if similar instances occur in the future, I reserve the right not to allow a minister to deliver a statement but to move straight to questions from members.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I welcome your comments. Paragraph 3.5 of the Scottish ministerial code spells out clearly that,

“When the Parliament is meeting, Ministers should ensure that important announcements of Government policy are made, in the first instance, to the Parliament”.

It would appear that the code has been broken.

Presiding Officer, I appreciate that matters to do with the ministerial code reside chiefly with the First Minister, but will you advise us whether the issue could be laid before the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee for further investigation?

The Presiding Officer: I thank Mr Kerr for his point of order. I have yet to see the statement, as I have been chairing in the Parliament, but I am aware of the significant references that the *Daily Record* has made to what I expect we are about to hear from the cabinet secretary. As I said, I will allow the statement to go ahead, but I will certainly look further into the matter.

15:22

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Humza Yousaf): Presiding Officer, I hope that you will appreciate that it was never my intention to cause you or the Parliament any issues when I spoke to the media ahead of my statement. If issues were caused, I offer an apology to you and to the chamber, and I give an assurance that we will take the necessary steps to ensure that it does not happen again.

The past 18 months has been a time of unprecedented pressure in the national health service, as it has faced the biggest challenge of its 73-year history. The Scottish Ambulance Service is the heartbeat of our NHS. It has a unique role in engaging with all parts of the health and social

care system across Scotland, 24 hours a day and seven days a week.

I again take the opportunity—as, I am sure, other members will do—to thank all our hard-working Ambulance Service staff for the work that they are doing in such difficult circumstances. I understand that those who call an ambulance are often in considerable distress, but I hope that we all agree that our ambulance colleagues deserve to be treated with the utmost respect.

It is important to remember that, despite the significant pressures that our service is under, staff continue to deliver a highly effective response to our high-acuity patients—30-day survival rates for such patients are at their highest ever recorded levels.

That said, I recognise that some people are not receiving the standard of service that they should be getting or the standard of service that the Ambulance Service and the Scottish Government want to be delivered. I completely accept that some of the cases that we have heard about—in the chamber last week and in the media—are unacceptable. I have no hesitation in apologising to families who have been let down.

It is in that context that the Ambulance Service is currently operating at level 4 of its escalation plan, which is the highest level. That decision has not been taken lightly. In practice, it means that all clinically trained staff in support departments have been redeployed to the front line. The service has stood up its national command and control centre, and management teams, regional co-ordination cells and support teams are all working extended hours.

The situation in Scotland is not unique. The global pandemic has created the most challenging crisis in almost every sphere of our lives—including our national health service—in the history of peacetime Britain and certainly in our lifetimes. Ambulance services across the UK, as well as the wider NHS, are experiencing unprecedented demand. That is largely because of Covid, but it is also due to a combination of increasingly complex cases, delayed demand and exceptionally busy emergency departments.

Last month, our ambulance crews responded to 10,733 immediately life-threatening incidents, which was 20.7 per cent of all incidents that were attended that month. Compared with the figures for August 2018, when there were 5,788 immediately life-threatening incidents, which was 10.6 per cent of incidents attended, that clearly shows the significant increase in acuity of presentations to the service.

The vast majority of patients in those immediately life-threatening incidents require to go to hospital. With acute occupancy for most boards

already between 87 and 96 per cent, and most mainland boards in excess of 100 per cent for intensive care unit occupancy, we can clearly see the pressures that our services are under.

That is why we have already taken significant action, both prior to and since the onset of the pandemic. That includes additional funding to recruit more ambulance staff, enhanced air transfer capacity through a contract with Loganair and setting up a strategic working group to implement actions to improve turnaround times for ambulances.

It is, however, important that I once again make it categorically clear that we are still firmly in the midst of a global pandemic. Today, I will outline to members the measures that we are putting in place to ensure that our Ambulance Service has the full range of support from our wider public services at its disposal as we enter what will inevitably be the most challenging part of the year, in the autumn and winter.

Our immediate actions will be backed by additional investment of up to £20 million, on top of the additional £20 million that has already been invested this year to recruit an additional 296 ambulance staff. That equates to additional in-year investment in the service of more than £44 million, which is an uplift of nearly 16 per cent on last year's resource budget.

Many of the actions that we are taking are aligned with suggestions that have been made by the unions that are attached to our Ambulance Service, which have set out a number of suggestions for support. Those actions focus on immediate assistance from partners, continued workforce enhancements and improvements to the flow of cases into emergency departments.

In terms of the immediate, there are short-term pressures on the Ambulance Service that will be relieved only through the wider public and voluntary sector standing up to support the service at this incredibly challenging time. I can confirm that a request for military assistance was made immediately after First Minister's question time last Thursday. Since then, officials have been working to finalise the package of support that the military will provide.

The assistance will consist mainly of the provision of 88 drivers to free up our paramedics and technicians to focus solely on providing patients with the best clinical care. Fifteen support staff are also being requested, which means that there will be support in the form of 103 military personnel. There are still authorisation processes to go through, but we do not envisage any challenges with gaining the required approval. All going well, some of those military personnel will be ready to be deployed and driving ambulances this

weekend. As always, my thanks go to the Army for its responsiveness.

I have also reached out to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, and I am glad to say that, in typical fashion, it has risen to our call. It will scale up the Ambulance Service's access to volunteer firefighters for driving, and that will now also include full-time firefighters. Again, that is with a view to providing more valuable paramedic and technician time on the front line.

The immediate assistance is not being sought only from the wider public sector. We have also brought in support from the British Red Cross, as well as private contractors such as taxi companies, to help with some of the Ambulance Service's work where no emergency ambulance is required. I make it absolutely clear that, if someone is in critical or life-threatening need, they will be taken to hospital in an ambulance, if one is requested. Alternative transport arrangements are for patients with low acuity. Patient safety will, of course, remain our number 1 priority.

We should bear it in mind that, in August this year, around 27 per cent of calls to the Ambulance Service did not require an ambulance response and only 21 per cent of calls involved life-threatening situations, although that percentage has risen considerably recently.

The decisions that I have outlined are not ones that we have taken lightly, but, given the urgency of the situation, the Government needs to respond with decisive, if unconventional, action to save lives, as it has done throughout the course of the pandemic. I make it clear that the full range of measures that I am announcing today have been assessed as clinically safe.

Of course, it is important that we are not only freeing up paramedic and technician capacity, but creating additional emergency capacity in the wider Ambulance Service. That is why we are also aiming to bring on board 100 second-year paramedic students to work across the service, including to assist our ambulance control centres with call handling and dispatching over the winter period.

On specific clinical issues, we are also bringing in temporary clinical input to decision making on mental health, addictions, falls, breathing difficulties, high-intensity users and trauma. That will provide senior specialist clinical decision support to patients, thereby optimising the service's response to people in need, and utilising additional clinical pathways where it is appropriate to do so.

Bolstering capacity at both the front and back ends of the Ambulance Service will be fundamental to saving lives, and I am thankful to all those individuals and organisations that have

offered their support. However, I am mindful that it has been, and will be, a long pandemic, and we cannot solely rely on immediate, short-term measures to build a sustainable future for the Ambulance Service. That is why, as part of our recovery plan, we will deliver almost 300 additional Ambulance Service staff by April 2022. Last year, 148 new staff were recruited, and the service plans to recruit another 443 this year, 148 of whom will be new staff, with the remainder covering planned staff turnover; 172 have already been recruited this year, with 186 due to be in post by the end of November, and the remainder by April 2022. The service is taking forward recruitment plans at pace.

The breakdown of new recruits is that there will be 69 staff in the north of Scotland, 139 in the west and 88 in the east. The additional new staff are a mixture of paramedics, newly qualified paramedics and technicians. We are also funding additional fleet for the service, which will see the introduction of a number of extra ambulances over the coming months.

As part of our on-going commitment with the service to reduce and remove the requirement for staff to work on call in some of our more remote and rural areas, we are providing funding for 14 additional staff, which will result in the on-call requirement being reduced in Campbeltown and removed entirely in Fort William, Kirkwall and Broadford.

We know that our emergency departments are also under significant pressure. That is why we need to ensure that we are not just creating further problems for A and E departments that are already struggling. Therefore, we are also further investing in additional hospital ambulance liaison officers. We are almost doubling the number of HALOs from the 11 who are currently in place, with the result that there will be 20 posts throughout the country.

Those liaison officers are important in supporting flow through emergency departments and improvement in ambulance turnaround times. HALOs will take part in the daily huddle and work across the hospital site in order to maximise flow as well as possible. The HALOs will be concentrated at our busiest sites.

Most of us have seen pictures from Scotland and across the UK of ambulances queued up outside emergency departments. Getting people the care that they need, in the most appropriate setting, is crucial, and is another key element in freeing up our ambulance crews to respond to other patients' needs.

We need a concerted effort across the whole public sector to ensure that all parts of the system can respond to the demand that the difficult winter

ahead will bring. Our forthcoming winter plan will set out the measures that we and our partners will take to ensure that we can deliver high-quality, safe care in a sustainable way in the coming months. That will create capacity in our community health and care services and in our hospitals, and it will ensure that there are alternative pathways that people can access, where it is safe to do so, in order to avoid their admission to hospital, as well as ensuring that they can be discharged from hospital as soon as it is clinically safe.

I know that some members have suggested having pop-up facilities outside our A and E departments. The issue has been explored, and, although we will keep it under review, our clinicians and the likes of the Royal College of Emergency Medicine have expressed patient safety concerns in relation to that option. However, with immediate effect, we are repurposing some spaces to maximise capacity at the front door of hospitals across the country to ensure that patients can be safely transferred to clinical teams as quickly as possible. Where necessary, that might include expanding the footprint of our hospitals, even on a temporary basis, and we are working with NHS boards on that.

This will undoubtedly be the most difficult and challenging autumn and winter period that our health and social care services have ever faced. As in other parts of the UK, Scotland's health boards have faced unprecedented demand over recent weeks, whether in emergency departments, in elective activity or in local general practitioner practices. The next months will require us all to come together to support one another, as we are seeing through the brilliant response to the call for help from the military, the fire service, the third sector, volunteers and the private sector, as well as from Ambulance Service staff themselves.

The wellbeing of our Ambulance Service and of health and social care workers more widely is of paramount importance. Throughout this period, our staff need to know that we are doing everything that we possibly can to provide them with the support that they need.

The situation that I have described has inevitably resulted in additional pressure for ambulance staff with regard to rest break compliance and shift overruns. This year, we are providing £500,000 of funding for additional support to Ambulance Service staff wellbeing. That includes additional welfare for crews and a range of wellbeing initiatives, such as personal resilience packages and techniques that are supported by a dedicated wellbeing team. I am still very supportive of SAS discussions with its trade union partners about having a rest break action plan in place as quickly as possible.

I have outlined an immediate plan of action, which is backed by up to £20 million of additional investment. Our Ambulance Service and NHS have been there for us in our hour of need. This Government will, in turn, be there to support our public services during their hour of need.

I look forward to taking members' questions.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues raised by his statement. I am conscious that his statement has overrun, for understandable reasons. I intend to protect the 20 minutes or so that have been allocated for questions. However, I would be grateful if members and the cabinet secretary could keep questions and answers as brief as possible.

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): I would normally have welcomed advance sight of the health secretary's statement, but, on this occasion, it was published on the front page of the *Daily Record* first, rather than announced to this Parliament.

Stephen Kerr: Shameful.

Sandesh Gulhane: For weeks, we have heard stories of horrendous waits for ambulances. This morning, Jamie McNamee of Unite the Union said:

"This is as bad as it's been, in my experience"

of 35 years in the Ambulance Service, and the Government is using the pandemic as an excuse for the long-standing problems in our Ambulance Service. He went on to say that the supposedly 300 new ambulance staff come from a totally different project that has been on-going since 2016. How many of the 300 positions are new?

The health secretary said in his statement:

"The Scottish Ambulance Service is the heartbeat of our NHS."

Why, then, is the Government demanding that it makes £15 million of efficiency savings, otherwise known as cuts?

Will the health secretary commit to publishing weekly response data so that we know exactly how the service is performing across the country?

When I asked the First Minister when we would get a winter NHS plan, she did not answer, preferring instead to read a pre-prepared script. Will the health secretary confirm now when Scotland's NHS will finally get the real plan that front-line staff and the public need?

Humza Yousaf: I have given detail in my statement about the additional staff that we are recruiting. On the one hand, the Opposition is telling me that we should have taken action many months ago but, on the other hand, it is castigating us for taking that action months and months ago.

We have taken that action and we have invested an additional £20 million, which, of course, will see an additional number of staff recruited to our Ambulance Service. I am delighted that we have those additional recruits. In my statement, I have just noted the additional actions that we will take, which are backed by £20 million of investment.

Among Dr Gulhane's other asks, he mentioned efficiencies. Let me be absolutely clear that there has not been and will not be a single penny cut from the Scottish Ambulance Service budget. The opposite is true. A moment ago, I told members that this year's budget has increased by £44 million, which is almost 16 per cent. We will continue to invest in the Scottish Ambulance Service.

Of course, when efficiencies are made, such as by introducing electric vehicles, saving money on petrol and diesel, the savings are retained by the health board—in this case, by the Scottish Ambulance Service. Dr Gulhane will forgive me if I do not take any lectures on public spending from a Conservative Party that is responsible for a decade of austerity in Scotland that has hit the poorest in our society the hardest.

On whether I would consider publishing more data and statistics, I will give that call some consideration and return to the member on that. A recovery plan is already under way, backed by £1 billion of investment. However, as I mentioned in my statement, we will bring forward a winter plan imminently.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before I call Jackie Baillie, I invite members who want to ask a question, if they have not already done so, to press their request-to-speak button now, or as soon as possible.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): On a day of new records, and not good ones, the health secretary has been missing in action, refusing press interviews about ambulances for five days, which—I think he would acknowledge—is unusual for him. Ambulance delays continue at record levels and people are dying as a result. Accident and emergency waiting times are at an all-time high, despite the best efforts of NHS staff, who deserve our thanks.

Just this morning, John Thomson, of the Royal College of Emergency Medicine, said that the NHS needs an additional 1,000 beds to cope with the current crisis, yet there was not a single mention of additional bed capacity in the cabinet secretary's statement. Is that because the Scottish National Party have cut beds in the NHS by 1,200 in the past 10 years?

Given that the problems with ambulance delays are actually about patient flows in A and E and a

lack of beds in hospitals, will the cabinet secretary tell me whether John Thomson was wrong when he asked for an increase in bed capacity? Will he urgently consider setting up temporary wards or field hospitals like the NHS Louisa Jordan?

Humza Yousaf: Ms Baillie is incorrect, and she may want to go back and correct the record, as I did interviews last week on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday. I suspect that, in order for her to suggest that I have been somehow missing in action, she has probably just not been watching the news. On the one hand, I have been castigated for speaking to the media, and on the other, I have been told that I have not been speaking to the media—[*Interruption.*]

The member may want to listen—I am referring to the fact that she may want to correct the record.

On additional bed capacity, Ms Baillie is, of course, correct that the problems that we are facing are undoubtedly due in part to the additional demand at our front door. We are having urgent discussions with local authorities and social care providers—this is one of the actions that relates to our winter plan, which I will bring to the chamber—about how we free up bed capacity among the delayed discharge cohort. It is reasonable for Ms Baillie to ask that question. We are urgently exploring that issue, and I will come back to Parliament with a further update.

As I announced, we are increasing the number of HALOs from 11 to 20. That will help to ensure that people are not just discharged from an ambulance, but that they work their way through into the hospital system so that they are not left sitting in A and E departments.

With regard to field hospitals, I mentioned that there are some concerns around pop-up facilities. As members would imagine, I have spoken to every single health board and mentioned that the equipment that was used in the NHS Louisa Jordan is available for them to use. However, it is not simply a case of setting up beds—those beds have to be staffed. We would have to take the workforce out of extremely busy hospitals and put them in—[*Interruption.*]

If the member just listened, as opposed to shouting from a sedentary position, she would know that I am trying to answer her question in all sincerity. I am not dismissing the idea in its entirety, but setting up beds is only part of the solution. We would have to ensure that those beds are staffed, and pull staff from sites that are already busy, which would present its own challenge. However, I would not dismiss the idea in its entirety.

Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP): Given that we are in the midst of a global pandemic, with unprecedented pressures across

the health service, including resultant pressures on our Ambulance Service, does the cabinet secretary agree that we should look at having all hands on deck?

For example, I would suggest bringing back to the wards those nurses who are currently in NHS management or education roles, thereby avoiding the current redeployment of theatre nurses and operating department practitioners away from their key roles.

Humza Yousaf: In short, yes. I know that health boards are already doing that, and they will continue to look at where staff can be redeployed to the front line when that is appropriate and necessary. In escalating to level 4, which is its highest level, the Ambulance Service has already taken clinical staff away from support roles and redeployed them on the front line.

We are also working with the appropriate bodies to think about making a call to arms to those retired staff who responded so well at the beginning of the pandemic, to see whether they can come back and help us during what will be the most challenging winter that the NHS has ever faced.

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): The past 18 months have been a time of unprecedented pressure in the NHS, but the problem is historical. In 2018, only 20 per cent of ambulance staff thought that there were enough staff to do their jobs and, even before the pandemic, the number of ambulances that recorded turnaround times of more than an hour had doubled. GMB Scotland recently said:

“The understaffing crisis in the ambulance service was already understood pre-Covid”.

Why did the SNP not recognise that at that time? Why did it actively choose to ignore the historical call from front-line staff to fix the problem before we reached the crisis? Does the cabinet secretary agree that the forthcoming winter plan that we are waiting for should have formed an essential component of the NHS recovery plan?

Humza Yousaf: Sue Webber is clearly not talking to her front-bench colleague, because he just said that we announced the investment in additional staff before the pandemic. Her own colleague has recognised that we were already addressing the issues around staffing in the Ambulance Service. The additional investment in the Scottish Ambulance Service will mean 300 additional—I use the word “additional” again—staff, which will help us in that regard.

On the winter plan, we are working closely with the UK Government to get finalisation of the additional consequential that will come our way. I

will inform the Parliament imminently about the detail of the plan.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Will the cabinet secretary say more about the 103 military staff who will be helping? For example, will they be driving their own vehicles or normal ambulances? Will the situation here be similar to the way in which the military are involved in England and Wales?

Humza Yousaf: I am sure that it will be. I have not seen the detail of the military aid to civil authorities—MACA—requests that the UK and Welsh Governments have made, although I know that they have been made. I put on record my thanks to the Army and military personnel for always answering the call with such responsiveness and pace.

The final details are being discussed by the Ambulance Service and the military. As I referenced in my statement, 88 of the military personnel will be driving ambulances and 15 will be in support roles. Once further details become available from the Ambulance Service, I will be happy to share that with John Mason.

Paul O’Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): The cabinet secretary says that there will be additional ambulance staff on the ground by April 2022 and that, of the 443 staff who will be recruited this year, only 148 will be new additional staff, with the rest being recruited to cover staff turnover. Does the cabinet secretary intend the British Army to support ambulance services all the way through until April 2022? Where will the military personnel be deployed, and when will members be made aware of that?

Humza Yousaf: I will send the final detail to members once it has been officially agreed between the Scottish Ambulance Service and the military. We expect some of the military personnel to be deployed at the weekend. As members might imagine, that will be in the areas where we are facing the most acute pressure.

Paul O’Kane will see in my statement that we will recruit 300 additional ambulance staff by April 2022, but he is right that some staff will be recruited to ensure that we do not have any gaps from staff turnover or retirement.

As I said, once the detail has been finalised, I am happy to provide further detail to all members on the military assistance request that has been made.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I note that only 21 per cent of calls in August were about life-threatening conditions. Although I welcome the 100 additional call handlers, will the cabinet secretary consider reviewing the 999 and 111 call

triage information technology systems to ensure that cases that can be dealt with by other services, such as out-of-hours GPs or minor injury clinics, are referred appropriately and are not sent an emergency ambulance? I stress that I am referring to the IT systems and not the call handlers themselves.

Humza Yousaf: The issue of the IT systems is looked at regularly by SAS clinical advisers in control centres. They already signpost patients to alternative services. However, increasing clinical capacity in control centres and strengthening the links to and availability of alternative pathways, including GPs, are a key part of the work that is to be done in support of patients getting the right care at the right time in very much the right place. By extension, that means making emergency ambulances available only for those patients who are most in need of that resource. I will look again at Christine Grahame’s point about the IT system; we have looked at it previously, but we will look again to see whether it can work in a more efficient manner.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): The situation is unacceptable. It is not just down to the pandemic, and to suggest that it undermines the concerns that staff have been expressing since long before we heard of Covid-19. We should never have reached a stage where the fire service, the Army and taxi drivers have to bail out front-line care staff. The British Medical Association said just this morning that no realistic workforce plan can get the NHS to work 10 per cent harder.

All of this is caused by an interruption of the flow throughout our NHS, from GPs to the lack of social care provision that leads to delayed discharge from hospital. How long does the cabinet secretary expect the crisis to last?

Humza Yousaf: We are still in the midst of a global pandemic. It is unbelievable that the member stands there and says that this has nothing to do with the pandemic. Of course it has something to do with the pandemic. We are still in the midst of that global pandemic. Case numbers and community transmission are still too high.

For the member to suggest that the pandemic has played no role does him no favours. He can wag his finger all he wishes from a sedentary position, but he will lack credibility if he does not acknowledge that fact. I have stood here and given the detail that 20.7 per cent of cases that the Ambulance Service responded to this August were of high acuity, in comparison to just over 10 per cent of cases in August 2018. That shows how the pressures of the pandemic are feeding through not only to the front door of our NHS but to its back door also.

We do not know how long this will last, as we are still in the midst of the pandemic. I do not have a crystal ball; life would be easier if I did. The Government will take immediate action, as I outlined my statement, to ensure that we bolster our NHS and our Ambulance Service. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We had enough sedentary interventions, Mr Cole-Hamilton.

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I have spoken to frustrated first responders in my region who, despite being ready and willing, are not being offered the training that is required for them to help with these workforce issues. They are baffled that the Army is being brought in before they are being used, despite many of those first responders having had blue-light training in their day jobs. Will the Scottish Government encourage the Scottish Ambulance Service to make use of the around 1,500 community first responders to help tackle the crisis?

Humza Yousaf: The amazing community first responders to whom Ms Roddick refers serve in partnership with the Scottish Ambulance Service to provide exceptional support to patients. I know that the SAS is planning to increase the number and the range of codes to which CFRs can be dispatched and is in advanced discussions about implementing digital solutions to support CFRs in keeping patients safe in ambulances that are en route. There are no immediate plans to train volunteers to drive under the blue light, predominantly due to United Kingdom-wide issues with driver training at present.

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): I have previously raised in the chamber the pressure that is being put on out-of-hours GP services. Is the cabinet secretary concerned that people who are faced with long waits at A and E or for ambulances might turn to out-of-hours general practice, putting further strain on a service that is already under extreme pressure? What impact does the cabinet secretary think that the increased demand for out-of-hours and emergency services will have on out-of-hours GPs? Will a similar package of support be put in place for out-of-hours practitioners and services?

Humza Yousaf: We are committed to increasing funding for primary care by 25 per cent. We made that commitment and I know that the member welcomed it. In short, we are looking at the entire system. The member is right to raise the point. The focus of this statement is understandably and rightly on the Ambulance Service, but we know that we must take a whole-systems approach. Therefore, the announcement that I intend to make about our winter plan will demonstrate the actions that we are taking across the entire system.

Of course, we would always say that individuals who call 999 should listen to the clinical advice about the best place for them to go. If they need an ambulance and if it is critical that they be in an emergency department, they will be taken there.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): What steps are being taken to ensure that Ambulance Service transport, including patient transport other than blue-light ambulances, can be utilised to free up ambulance capacity?

Humza Yousaf: I said in my statement that we will look at other transport. I thank the British Red Cross for the support that it has already provided. Let me be clear, as I was in answer to the previous question: if anyone clinically requires an ambulance, an ambulance will come to them. Following clinical triage and ensuring that there are no patient safety issues—which is of paramount importance—it makes sense to use all reasonable options to ensure that patients get to the right place at the right time. I have outlined some of those measures and some of the actions that we are taking that will have an immediate impact in that regard.

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for coming to Parliament to repeat his statement. For someone who is in contempt of Parliament, he has shown little contrition.

Senior police officers have told me that significant front-line policing resources are being lost due to delays at A and E departments. Many police officers are now spending hours transporting patients from the scenes of incidents as a result of severe ambulance delays. What contact has the cabinet secretary had with Police Scotland to assess the full impact that the crisis in our NHS is now having on the fight against crime?

Humza Yousaf: As the member can imagine, my officials and I speak across the Government and across portfolios about the pressures. I thank Police Scotland. I know from my previous role the importance of joined-up working between our emergency services, and I thank our police officers for the incredible work that they have done in that regard. Even pre-pandemic, they were often at the forefront when it came to challenges around vulnerable people, and particularly those with mental health challenges. We continue to work across all the emergency services and across Government, and I thank all those emergency responders who have responded to our call during this time of great need.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I ask Colin Smyth to be brief.

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): The cabinet secretary has just admitted that the reason for the reluctance to establish temporary wards

and field hospitals is that health boards are struggling to safely staff existing hospitals. What does it say about the Government's more than a decade of utter failure in NHS workforce planning that health boards have been unable to recruit enough nurses and doctors to meet pre-pandemic demand, never mind the extra demand caused by the crisis?

Humza Yousaf: Of course, the NHS workforce under this Government is at record levels. Not only that, here in Scotland we have the best-paid NHS staff anywhere in the entire United Kingdom. We will continue to pay them the best in the UK and we will ensure that our NHS remains at record levels.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the statement and questions. I thank the cabinet secretary and members for allowing us to get through all the questions.

Net Zero Nation

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-01293, in the name of Michael Matheson, on a net zero nation.

15:57

The Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport (Michael Matheson): The debate is on a matter of parliamentary consensus: the need to tackle the climate and nature emergencies in a way that is both fair and just. The actions that we must take now will transform our society and our economy beyond anything that we have seen since the industrial revolution, so I would like to set out how, through the programme for government that we announced recently, we will go about helping to support the step changes that will be necessary on that journey.

Scotland has achieved much in its response to the climate crisis, so far. We have halved our greenhouse gas emissions and have set some of the most ambitious legally binding targets in the world, alongside our plan to get to net zero in a way that is fair to all. However, the progress that we have made does not take away from the scale of the challenge that remains, or from the opportunities for our economic prosperity, en route.

Members will be aware of the recent report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which has been described as

"a code red for humanity".

Transformational change requires us to do things differently. That is why we must confront the twin climate and nature emergencies in a way that captures the opportunities to deliver a fairer and greener Scotland. In doing so, we will need to decarbonise our homes and buildings as well as our energy, transport and industry, at an unprecedented scale and pace.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): Since new members were admitted to his Government in recent weeks, has the cabinet secretary changed his policy on supporting the expansion of Heathrow airport?

Michael Matheson: As Willie Rennie will be well aware, and as has been repeated to him on many occasions, the decision to expand Heathrow airport is a matter for the United Kingdom Government.

Heat demand accounts for about 20 per cent of our emissions, so at least 1 million Scottish homes will need to move to a net zero heating system by 2030. That is why we will allocate at least £1.8

billion in the current session of Parliament to support exhilarated deployment of heat and energy efficiency measures in homes and buildings across Scotland.

Our draft heat in buildings strategy acknowledges that there are tensions between reducing emissions and ending fuel poverty. Many zero-emissions heating systems are costlier to install and to run than higher-emissions alternatives. That is why we are committed, during the transition, to supporting the people who are least able to pay, and to protecting those who are most vulnerable to increases in costs. This year, we have increased funding for our energy efficiency and fuel poverty schemes by allocating a record £50 million for the warmer homes Scotland programme in order to incentivise uptake of zero-carbon heating, which will benefit communities that are not served by the gas grid. That is also why the social housing net zero heat fund will invest at least £100 million over the next five years on supporting social housing landlords to contribute to our heat decarbonisation and fuel poverty objectives.

We will soon publish our final heat in buildings strategy and will establish a new dedicated national public energy agency to provide leadership and a co-ordinated approach to delivering at the pace and scale that are required in decarbonising domestic and non-domestic premises.

Another crucial priority is our energy transition. The planet and future generations demand that we transition from fossil fuels to renewables and low-carbon energy, but we must do that in a way that is fair and just.

We cannot consider our journey to net zero without touching on the North Sea. As was discussed in the chamber last week, the oil and gas sector will continue to provide an important amount of domestic energy. However, more crucially, its infrastructure, skills and expertise will be crucial assets in the transition.

We will make progress in helping Scotland to reduce its reliance on fossil fuels. Last year, the equivalent of 96 per cent of gross electricity consumption came from renewable sources. That sits alongside our ambition to increase offshore wind power capacity to 11GW by 2030—enough to power 8 million homes.

Work has also begun on developing a refreshed energy strategy, with our reaffirmed commitment to a just transition for all regions of Scotland. Our just energy transition plans will also be an integral part of our refreshed energy strategy, which will take a whole-systems approach to energy and will provide a road map to 2030 and a vision to 2045.

To drive forward our green transport revolution, our strategic transport projects review will, by the end of this year, publish its phase 2 recommendations for formal consultation. The final STPR2 report will make recommendations for the Scottish Government's future transport investment priorities over the next two decades. It is important that STPR2 includes a climate compatibility assessment, which will allow us to understand clearly the impacts on climate change of infrastructure investment options.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): Very briefly, does the cabinet secretary have any idea of the timescale for STPR2? Clearly, it is very important that we know what is coming.

Michael Matheson: I mentioned that phase 2 will be published by the end of this year for consultation. It is on time, based on what was set out earlier this year.

We also know that the pandemic has led to fundamental shifts in travel behaviours. We want to ensure that people continue to make the sustainable travel choices that have been seen during the pandemic, that people return to public transport use and that our economic recovery does not overtly return to road-based travel. That will require us to maximise efforts to decarbonise the sector and to change our travel behaviour by making choices that are more sustainable. That is why our commitment to reducing car kilometres by 20 per cent by 2030 is world leading. *[Interruption.]* I am afraid that I need to make progress.

Scotland's nature and marine economy are also vital elements in securing a net zero future. Nature-based solutions will account for about 30 per cent of the emissions reductions that are needed.

Halting nature decline means that we need to invest now in protection and restoration of our natural environment. That is why, over this session of Parliament, we are committing at least £500 million to our natural economy, including £22 million for restoration of degraded peatlands in this financial year alone. Investment also includes £100 million to increase forestry planting, £30 million to expand Scotland's natural forests and land, and £20 million to increase nursery stocks.

We will publish a biodiversity strategy within a year of the United Nations 15th conference of the parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity—COP15—next month and we will introduce a natural environment bill in year 3 of this session of Parliament.

We are also committed to stepping up our protection of Scotland's marine environment. Some 37 per cent of Scottish waters are already designated as marine protected areas. We will now begin the process of designating 10 per cent

of our seas as highly protected marine areas, and we aim to complete that by 2026. A healthy and resilient marine environment is critical to supporting a healthy blue economy and to achieving our net zero ambitions.

At the heart of our efforts is a defining mission to achieve a just transition that maximises economic, social and environmental opportunities and that leaves nobody behind. It is essential that we support the transformation of industries, that we help businesses to adapt and innovate, and that we support communities to ensure that they are cleaner, safer and more accessible. That is not an easy task, but it is crucial and will have rewards for us in the future.

Our response to the just transition commission and our national just transition planning framework, which was published alongside the programme for government, set out our long-term vision and approach, including a skills guarantee for workers in carbon-intensive sectors and new support for participatory budgets to deliver climate action.

We have also announced a new remit for the just transition commission and have confirmed that Professor Jim Skea will continue to chair it. The new commission will shift to a focus on delivery and will support and scrutinise the production and delivery of Government-led transition plans.

As a further demonstration of our commitment, we are working with partners, communities and other stakeholders to take forward a 10-year £500 million just transition fund for the north-east and Moray. That will support Scotland's energy transition by creating jobs and maximising the region's economic potential in becoming a centre of excellence.

The calls for further and faster action gather pace as we look towards Glasgow hosting the UN climate change conference of the parties 26—COP26—in just under 50 days. COP26 is the world's best, if not its last, chance to make sure that we deliver on the Paris agreement. We will play our part in support of the aim of achieving agreement in Glasgow. We will do so by making sure that we target support at countries in the global south by doubling our climate justice fund to support those who have contributed least to climate change, but who are impacted most by it.

This Government, as has been set out in our priorities in the programme for government, will not shy away from taking on the challenges of dealing with climate change and nature loss. Delivering a just transition in a fairer and greener society will benefit us all. We are all determined to play our part in delivering that in becoming a net zero nation.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Government must do everything in its power to tackle the escalating climate and nature emergencies and deliver a just transition for all; notes the recent UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report and the need for Scotland to advance determinedly to decarbonise homes, buildings, energy, industry and transport, and to restore, protect and enhance the natural environment and its assets; welcomes, therefore, the Scottish Government's commitments in this area, which include investing at least £1.8 billion in zero carbon buildings during the current parliamentary session, achieving a 20% reduction in car kilometres by 2030 and setting targets for species protection in a nature recovery bill; agrees that the transition to a low-carbon economy and a climate resilient Scotland requires urgent transformational action and must be done in a fair and just way that leaves no one, and no community, behind, and recognises that there are also significant opportunities for Scotland to lead the way globally in finding solutions.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Liam Kerr to speak to and to move amendment S6M-01293.1.

16:08

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): I will start with a point of consensus—the cabinet secretary is absolutely right to demand that we note the IPCC report and its conclusion. However, although the SNP talks a good game, its record rarely matches its rhetoric.

Let us take the setting of legal emissions targets, which were missed three years in a row. Interestingly, when I asked the minister what sanction or penalties applied, and to whom, for a breach of that statutory target, I was told that ministers must

“bring forward—as soon as reasonably practicable after such a target outcome has been reported—additional policies and proposals to compensate”.—[Written Answers, 16 June 2021; S6W-00771.]

That is reassuring, then. Furthermore, the climate emergency response group noted that more than two thirds of Scotland's key climate policies are not on track, with a tenth not met in any meaningful way.

Scottish Conservative speakers will examine specific areas more fully over this afternoon. I will briefly highlight three. The first is transport. In 2018, transport accounted for 36 per cent of total greenhouse gas emissions in Scotland. Since the 1990 baseline, such emissions have fallen by just 0.5 per cent. Private cars are the largest single source of transport emissions—they account for 39 per cent of transport emissions—so what is to be done?

It is not good enough to demand that we all drive electric vehicles, unless the Government can answer the issue of recharge points and range anxiety. The Climate Change Committee suggests

that we will need an estimated 30,000 charging points in Scotland by 2030; currently there are only 2,558 public charging points, and I am sure that all members get emails from constituents to inform us about the ones that do not work. Transport Scotland reports that we will need more than 4,000 new public charging stations each year over the next decade if we are to meet the expected rise in demand—and that is before we even get into the digital connectivity that will be required in rural areas.

Instead of acting in that regard, the Scottish Government sets a target of reducing the distance that is travelled by car by 20 per cent by 2030, but it does not say where it got that figure from or how it will be achieved. It is interesting that the cabinet secretary did not say that in his speech. I think that he refused to take two interventions in which he would no doubt have been asked to clarify that point. Perhaps he will do it in his closing speech. The underlying research remains unpublished. Given that the distance that is travelled by car has increased by 5.16 billion kilometres since 1999 and Transport Scotland predicts that it will continue to grow into the mid-2030s, one wonders whether the Scottish Government's target will be another missed target.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): Alex Cole-Hamilton said at the weekend that people should be given the opportunity to test electric vehicles, perhaps at weekends, funded by the Government. Would the Conservatives support that approach?

Liam Kerr: It is an interesting idea. I saw that Alex Cole-Hamilton was flying the idea. The key issue is range anxiety, which goes to my point about charging.

The other point about transport that I must get over is that the decarbonisation of transport needs to overcome ministerial disapproval. In response to the news that British Airways is flying from London to Glasgow on sustainable aviation fuel, Patrick Harvie fumed:

“Take. The. Train ... and tax aviation fuel”.

If he ever decides to take the train somewhere out of central belt cities—of course, he will have to drive his ministerial car on a Sunday—perhaps he will come to Fraserburgh or Peterhead, which are further than any other town from the British Rail network and suggest to people there that they should take the train. Perhaps he will tell dwellers of rural Scotland that they must take the non-existent bus service. The Government has to start thinking about what it is saying. It cannot just spout warm words and soundbites.

One of the biggest challenges in reducing carbon dioxide emissions will be the management of energy consumption in our homes. The Climate

Change Committee reports that domestic energy accounts for a fifth of our carbon dioxide emissions. As we just heard, the Scottish Government's solution is to tell people to convert the systems in their homes from fossil fuel boilers to zero-emissions systems. According to an answer from Patrick Harvie last week, the average cost of doing that is £12,000, which might be possible on a ministerial salary but it is far beyond the reach of most people. I asked the new minister what plans the Government has to increase consumer awareness of heat pumps, and whether there is a roll-out strategy in that regard. I was told that the draft heat and buildings strategy, which the cabinet secretary mentioned and which was published last February, commits to developing and implementing

“a bespoke public engagement strategy for heat in buildings”,

to help people to learn about their benefits. When might that happen? We just do not know.

Michael Matheson: The member emphasises the need to decarbonise domestic premises. Does he recognise that one of the most effective ways of decarbonising domestic heating is the use of hydrogen in the natural gas network? Given that his party at Westminster controls the decision making about when that will be possible, will he advise the Parliament as to when the UK Government will give consent to decarbonising the natural gas system and turning it into a hydrogen-based system that can be deployed in domestic premises?

Liam Kerr: What is most interesting is that the UK Government published, just last month, a hydrogen strategy—[*Interruption.*] The cabinet secretary is shouting “When?” from a sedentary position; I might ask when the Scottish Government will publish a hydrogen strategy.

In his speech, the cabinet secretary trumpeted that he will provide £1.8 billion to decarbonise 1 million homes by 2030. I did some figures on that: it means £1,800 per household. Currently, data suggest that heat pumps are the best and most affordable way to decarbonise homes. Air-source heat pumps are the cheapest of those, at between £5,000 and £8,000. That pledge is therefore only a partial subsidy, which means that home owners will again need to incur significant costs to help to deliver the Government's targets.

I am aware that I am coming to the end of my time.

Last week, I said that demand is among the biggest issues. Until we address the demand for energy, we cannot address the supply. The move to net zero emissions will require significant and wide-ranging demand reduction. Heat accounts for over half of Scotland's total energy consumption.

That is followed by transport, which accounts for around a quarter, and electricity, which accounts for just over a fifth. The UK gets around three quarters of its total energy from fossil fuels. We know from the debate last week that there will still be a significant need by 2050. Yesterday morning, gas provided slightly over half of Britain's electricity. We are reading daily reports about how wholesale prices of gas have surged by 250 per cent since January. Of course global causes underlie that, such as European gas stocks being low and declining supplies from Russia. However, if we reduce production faster than demand, we will be at the mercy of global events. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member does not have time to take an intervention. He is winding up.

Liam Kerr: We will offshore our responsibilities and expose ourselves to significantly less environmentally sound sources.

Those are the principles that underlie my amendment.

I move amendment S6M-01293.1, to leave out from “welcomes” to end and insert:

“expresses concern at the lack of detail and planning on how the Scottish Government will achieve its climate change targets, including delivering a net zero economy by 2045; notes the Scottish Government's failure to achieve its own climate change targets for the last three years; calls upon the Scottish Government to increase investment in making homes more energy efficient, particularly in supporting homeowners through a Help to Renovate Fund; notes the failure to deliver green manufacturing jobs, and calls upon the Scottish Government to link the transition to increased opportunities for workers in Scotland; calls for the Scottish Government to introduce a Circular Economy Bill; further calls for the Scottish Government to focus on a transition that reduces emissions through rolling out electric and hydrogen vehicles rather than abandoning key road upgrades; calls upon the Scottish Government to introduce a Nature Bill to strengthen environmental protections for land and species, and further calls on the Scottish Government to ensure that the costs of the transition to net zero do not fall upon individuals, families and communities.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We are slightly overrunning and are quite tight for time as a result of the statement.

16:16

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): I am pleased to open the debate on behalf of Scottish Labour.

In his motion, the cabinet secretary asks the Parliament to agree

“that the Scottish Government must do everything in its power to tackle the escalating climate and nature emergencies and deliver a just transition for all”.

Labour members whole-heartedly share those ambitions.

When the Scottish Government declared a climate emergency back in 2019, the then Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform stated:

“The evidence is irrefutable. The science is clear, and people have been clear: they expect action.”—*[Official Report, 14 May 2019; c 10.]*

The people do, indeed, expect action. That is why I argued in the chamber last week that climate inaction is the single biggest threat to our planet. Although we support the intent behind the Government's motion, we want to see bolder and faster action.

I believe that there is consensus on the ambition for a public energy company. The Scottish Government previously committed to that, there is a democratic mandate and, over the summer, I and a range of colleagues, including Lorna Slater, pressed the Government for an answer on a date for that project. I hope that we can have a constructive discussion on that today. It is disappointing that a public energy company appears to have been taken off the table by ministers. Scottish Labour wants to bring it back to life today.

We are asking the Parliament to agree

“that the Scottish Government should act with urgency to introduce plans for a publicly-owned, not-for-profit energy company”

because we believe that that could be a game changer with multiple benefits that could accelerate Scotland's journey towards net zero while addressing the affordability of household bills.

We can all see that the market-led model of energy transition is failing. It is failing customers, workers and businesses in Scotland. We must recognise that the state has a huge role to play in helping to build a net zero nation. A Scottish national energy company that is not for profit and owns assets could remove profiteering from the picture and deliver affordable energy to customers. It could facilitate a quicker transition to renewable energy, and it could pioneer new ways of delivering heat into households through methods such as district heating and ground source heat pumps. It is important that it could also help to create the high-skilled green jobs that we badly need.

The just transition commission told us that a publicly owned energy company should be established

“at pace with a broad remit.”

That could be revolutionary for Scotland, and there is precedent for it elsewhere. We can look to Denmark and Ørsted. That company went from producing 15 per cent of its energy from

renewables in 2009 to producing 85 per cent of its energy from renewables 10 years later. While the Scottish Parliament was swithering about declaring a climate emergency, Ørsted did better, went way ahead and ran with its big ideas. We can catch up.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): The member mentions Denmark. Will she accept that there are many public energy companies in Denmark at a municipal level that are owned by the local community and that supply heat to local people? That could be a model for Scotland—having not just one energy company but multiple such companies.

Monica Lennon: I am glad that Mark Ruskell pointed that out. I was going to talk later about local energy co-operatives and what we can do at a local level. Today, the issue is not about being prescriptive about what energy companies should be, but to at least have the debate and to ask the Scottish Government to put those proposals back on the table. We have all got good ideas to contribute.

We need to catch up. The potential benefits of a public energy company were cited in the Common Weal report “Powering our ambitions” and include tackling fuel poverty and social inequality, assisting with achieving national emissions reductions targets, development and deployment of new renewable, low-carbon energy supplies, supporting local energy co-operatives and more. Is it ambitious? Yes. Is this achievable? Absolutely.

I was struck by the remarks of Dr Craig Dalzell, head of policy at Common Weal, when commenting on the escalating gas crisis. He said:

“Someone has to renationalise energy. If Scotland doesn’t, one of Boris’s more sensible successors will. It’s a use-it-or-lose-it situation for the Scottish Government. Use the powers they have to create a national energy company – focusing first on heat, where powers are fully devolved, or those powers will be used elsewhere.”

We believe that plans for an asset-owning, not-for-profit, public energy company should be brought forward without delay. Remember that more than a third of social housing tenants live in fuel poverty. Scotland is an energy-rich nation, but it is to our shame that so many households must choose between heating their homes and eating. The wholesale gas crisis is hugely worrying. We know that bills are rising. Too many children are hungry and too many homes will be freezing this winter. Cutting universal credit is absolutely the wrong thing for the UK Government to do.

I was going to talk about a local visit but I have run out of time because I took an intervention from Mark Ruskell. I will briefly point to the great work that North Ayrshire Council is doing under the leadership of Labour’s Joe Cullinane. It has

impressive plans for a second solar and wind farm, which is very exciting and ambitious. There are many good examples of wind resource available to local councils.

The vote tonight should not be the last opportunity to debate and discuss what a publicly owned, not-for-profit, asset-owning national energy company should and could do. I ask members to support the Labour amendment at decision time because we need to choose climate action that is transformative.

I move amendment S6M-01293.3, to insert at end:

“, and agrees that the Scottish Government should act with urgency to introduce plans for a publicly-owned, not-for-profit energy company, to provide direction and large-scale investment into Scotland’s low-carbon energy sector, which will help create high-skilled, green jobs for workers in Scotland, tackle fuel poverty and reduce costs for consumers in Scotland.”

16:22

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): We do not have a chance of meeting our climate change targets unless transport is rapidly decarbonised. In 2015, transport became Scotland’s single largest source of greenhouse gas emissions—it is the source of more than a third. Heathrow is already the single biggest producer of emissions in the UK. A third runway would go directly against our green ambitions. Scotland flights from Heathrow alone would release 600,000 tonnes of emissions into the environment.

Despite that, the coalition Government has a contract to support the building of a third runway. When the First Minister stood in the Scottish Parliament and declared a climate emergency, we were told that difficult decisions would have to be made and that everything would now be under review—everything, it seems, except that contract. However, with the Greens in Government, I now expect that to change—and it needs to change before COP26.

Achieving sustainability will require the acceleration of other work, including the opening of new railway lines and stations, establishing a network of well-maintained rapid chargers for electric vehicles and additional support to rapidly increase active travel. All new public sector vehicles should be electric. There should be longer, Government-backed interest-free loans to enable people to buy electric vehicles. We support a scheme to enable everyone to try out an electric car for a weekend, funded by the Government.

There is deep frustration in the agriculture sector about the dithering that has gone on for some years on the introduction of a new farm support scheme. There has to be a 31 per cent cut

in agricultural carbon emissions by 2032—that is only 11 years away. The coalition Government has set up new working groups and has held consultations and debates on farm support, but that has been happening for years with little progress. There are tensions between forestry and productive land, between biodiversity and energy crops and between domestic production and offshoring. Decisions on all those things are difficult, but delaying them will not make them any easier. The longer the Government delays, the harder it will be for farmers to deliver that 31 per cent cut by 2032.

With energy prices ready to blow household budgets or energy companies apart, we face a crisis. The conditions for the price rise are understandable, with the economy surging after the lockdown and gas production spluttering to catch up, but the consequences cannot be tolerated. We must accelerate our sustainable energy generation so that we can have the security of supply that we desperately need. All Governments have been far too sluggish on the transition to renewables. Our plan for the transition to less demand for fossil fuels means exploiting every technology, from decarbonising home heating—I want a million heat pumps in Scotland—to using hydrogen and electric for transport and making more use of wind and wave power.

The Scottish Government talks big but often fails to deliver. Let us take, for example, the state-owned energy company. For years, I have been asking questions about the Government's last failure: Our Power. That project wasted £10 million of Government funds, and it appears that very little was learned.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): Mr Rennie, would you bring your remarks to a close, please?

Willie Rennie: Certainly. I suspect that the current Government wishes that it had agreed to my request for an inquiry.

From Heathrow to transport to agriculture, this Government talks a good game but often fails to deliver.

16:27

Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP): This is a general debate, but, during this parliamentary session, we must focus in depth on every element of the climate change and biodiversity crisis. It is clear that there are three key priorities: heat and housing, decarbonisation of transport and biodiversity. In this short speech, I will briefly touch on skills, innovation, nature and transition.

We have already heard about the need for ambition and leadership, but we also need precision of policy and pace of delivery, and I have some initial suggestions to make in those areas. In relation to skills, I recommend three specific steps. On Monday, I visited West Lothian College, which is ready, able and willing to gear up at scale training for new building standards and retrofitting skills in an area of growing population. We need the Government to ensure that the Scottish Funding Council can be equally as agile at funding colleges in order to scale up quickly.

It is not just down to industry: the Government and its agencies will have to have the volume and skills base needed, for example, to deliver mass marine renewable licences and consents at scale. I am also yet to be convinced that there is sufficient co-ordination in delivering a skills passport so that energy workers in carbon do not end up having to repeat payment for dual fuel training. A renewable skills guarantee for carbon workers is welcome, but, if it is just a safety net and not a comprehensive, co-ordinated and immediate exercise, it will not be enough. *[Interruption.]* I have only a short period of time in which to make my remarks.

On innovation, we need to create the space, demand and, where needed, the support to incentivise domestically based and, preferably, domestically owned renewable manufacturing companies. I recently visited Invinity Energy Systems in Bathgate in my constituency, which is the only UK producer of long-life vanadium storage batteries for the renewables sector. It supplies the European Marine Energy Centre project in Eday in Orkney and provides storage capacity for a mass solar farm in Australia, and its batteries are an alternative to lithium batteries, which, as many people know, have issues. That company is not Scottish owned but it is expanding and using highly skilled Scottish engineering talent.

However, if we want innovation, we cannot preclude by size. The cabinet secretary should review and increase the size by which small innovative companies can secure marine licences, so that they can grow, rather than play safe and have large monopolies of capital underwriting, controlling and benefiting from the economic opportunities of renewables.

I welcome the £500 million investment in our natural economy, with £150 million for woodland creation and £250 million for peatland restoration. More action is needed at all levels to halt the loss of biodiversity, and the current ecological situation cannot and must not be left in the shadows of the net zero drive. That is why I welcome the proposals for the natural environment bill, which will contain statutory targets aimed at preventing

any further extinctions of wildlife and halting declines by 2030, and driving progress in restoring Scotland's natural environment by 2045.

Finally, on transition, oil was first discovered in my West Lothian constituency. It was shale oil, and we can still see the red shale bings as we come into Edinburgh. We then transitioned to coal, then car making with British Leyland, then semiconductor companies and, when they all closed, the UK Government sited Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs in Bathgate before removing more 1,000 jobs to Edinburgh recently. We know from harsh experience that transition must be proactively managed if communities and people are not to be damaged. That is why, above all, we must ensure that the shift to renewables is a just transition. With not only ambition and leadership but precision of policy and pace of delivery, Scotland can do just that so that we can have a Bathgate once more.

16:31

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): I think that we can all agree in this debate on one thing, which is that we need to cut carbon emissions and that whatever target we set to reach net zero, we have to achieve it.

I will focus my remarks on transport, the biggest contributor to carbon emissions, and start with active travel, which I am keen on. There is no reason why people cannot walk or cycle instead of taking the car for many short journeys, but still too few people do. When it comes to cycling, many people do not feel safe, so we need to invest more in segregated routes and maintain them. We also need to teach children and adults how to ride safely. The Scottish Government's recent conversion to our own manifesto target of spending 10 per cent of the transport budget on active travel infrastructure is welcome, but it must deliver.

Next, on motor travel, we need a green recovery from the pandemic, but it cannot be a car-led one. That does not mean that we ignore cars, vans or lorries, because investment in roads is needed as congestion is bad and therefore projects such as the dualling of the entire A96 must go ahead. However, ultimately, we will have to move to zero or low-emission vehicles, be they electric or hydrogen. The infrastructure is not fully there yet and it often does not work. For example, someone told me at the weekend that a fast charger near where I live works only if twigs are stuck in it—that is not good enough.

On public transport, I am convinced that people will use it if it gets them where they want to go, is integrated and has simple, low fares. Decarbonising the bus fleet is vital, but the idea

that we can replace half the Scottish bus fleet by 2023 is for the birds. After talking to Scottish bus operators this week, it is clear to me that they are on board but that, having already met strict Euro 6 emissions targets, they will struggle to do it all again. Aside from the cost, the speed at which utilities move was described to me as “cripplingly slow”, and bus manufacturers will struggle to keep up with demand.

Next, on trains, we need a mix of technologies in Scotland, from electrification of some lines—like the one to my home town of East Kilbride—to the use of battery trains, hybrid trains and hydrogen. However, we might need to keep diesel for a while as we get that right. We need to work with the UK Government to shift more freight on to trains and we should also, where feasible, open up old lines. I am not convinced that nationalisation will achieve any of that, and the Scottish Government should say why it believes that it will. It has not done that so far—but there will be more on that tomorrow.

Whenever we can get new ferries—we can only hope—it is clear that they should be more fuel efficient. If we have an aviation sector left after the pandemic, it can be a catalyst for change.

Last week, the SNP Government published a 54-page document on how it will engage with the public on climate change. It was the usual waffle with a nice photo of a father and daughter at an iron-age fort, a somewhat fluffy introduction from Michael Matheson and the claim throughout that we, in Scotland, have something that is described as an open Government—I am none the wiser, either. If we really want to get to net zero, we need less Governmentspeak such as that and more Government action.

16:35

Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): I have been a climate activist since my teens and, long before such activity was widely seen as desirable, my husband and I ran an eco shop in Ayrshire called Green People, which supplied the area with locally produced organic foods, clothing, reusable menstrual products and staples for refilling. I knew back then that supporting our producers to work in sustainable ways is key to dealing with our climate emergency. The recent code red report from the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change further underlines the emergency that we face.

My mum grew up on an Ayrshire dairy farm, and I will use my short time today to speak about the huge amount of work, which often goes unnoticed, that is happening in the dairy sector to address climate change. It is vital that our farmers and producers are afforded a just transition that is seen as being every bit as important as our move

away from oil and gas. Sustainable farming must be at the heart of our rural communities as we seek to deliver the ambitions that are set out in our programme for government for a fairer, greener Scotland.

My constituency of Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley has among the highest concentrations of dairy herds in Scotland, and dairy farmers across the area are coming together to drive forward sustainable farming goals. Prominent milk co-operative First Milk is facilitating workshops across Ayrshire and Scotland to deliver on its first4milk regenerative farming pledge, which more than 93 per cent of its members have signed up for.

Through extensive research and data analysis, First Milk believes that regenerative agriculture presents the best opportunity to meet our collective climate and biodiversity obligations in a way that complements how most of its members already farm. To put it simply, under regenerative agriculture, food production also improves the environment. Regenerative farmers typically disturb the soil as little as possible and never leave it bare. They encourage plant diversity while always maintaining a living root, and they incorporate livestock into soil cultivation.

Before the pledge was introduced, most First Milk members already farmed at least some of their land in a way that could be called regenerative. By holding farm workshops, First Milk is capturing the good work that is being done as well as encouraging the adoption of regenerative principles more widely.

We all realise now that peatlands offer a huge amount of carbon storage, but many people have failed to realise that, by stripping out some modern-day intensive farming methods such as overtilling the soil, we can create conditions that allow a rich and biodiverse universe under our fields, which actively draws down a huge amount of carbon while allowing crops to flourish up top. Healthy soil equals carbon reduction. We must ensure that carbon calculators such as Agrical and Cool Farm Tool capture that.

In a bygone era, bison, caribou and wildebeest grazed lands around the globe and helped to create rich and fertile soils. Unfortunately, such lands have been depleted and turned into dust bowls all too easily by modern farming methods. By reintroducing a more natural grazing method and planting multispecies grazing crops that promote root growth, which keeps underground organisms thriving while offering the grazing animals a more nutritionally dense feed, and by rotating grazing paddocks regularly and always ensuring a crop cover, farmers will reduce their costs, increase their yield and improve animal and soil health—all while driving down their carbon emissions.

The recent establishment of the agriculture reform implementation oversight board—that is not easy to say—will continue to ensure that farmers lead our move towards sustainable farming and will drive forward the recommendations of farmer-led groups from the previous parliamentary session. The board will place farmers and crofters at the heart of a future support framework and will help Scottish agriculture to become more economically and environmentally sustainable.

What is certain is that, by farming regeneratively, our farmers are part of the climate change solution while ensuring that they create resilient sustainable farms that are future proofed for generations to come and that they continue to feed our nation with our amazing Scottish larder.

16:40

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): I welcome this timely debate on how we move towards a net zero society and support for a just transition. The cabinet secretary said that it is a matter of consensus; indeed, many parts of society are already working on how they decarbonise.

The concept of a just transition came from the trade union movement, although we all have to accept that there has probably never been a just transition. When there have been economic changes in the past, there has been no just transition, and working people and their communities have suffered. Therefore, the challenge of delivering a just transition is not easy.

Employment in Scotland's low-carbon and renewable energy sector fell from 23,000 in 2012 to 21,400 in 2019, and that was before Covid. The Scottish Government has promised to deliver 130,000 green jobs by the end of this year but, so far, it has delivered only 21,000. A Friends of the Earth report that was published last week showed that North Sea production has increased by 15 per cent since the climate emergency was declared. I say those things not to make political points but to highlight the scale of the challenge.

The Labour manifesto for the 2019 general election committed to guaranteeing a job with equivalent terms and conditions to those of workers in the oil and gas sector who lost their jobs as a result of the move away from the sector. I have called for the use of furlough for oil and gas workers until equivalent alternative employment can be created. We need to show that level of ambition to ensure that there is decisive action to address the climate challenge.

Liam Kerr: The other week, the just transition commission told the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee that the number of such jobs is significantly lower than the number of jobs in the

oil and gas sector. How does the member square that circle?

Katy Clark: A Scottish Trades Union Congress report has estimated that 350,000 jobs could result from green policies. Actually, we do not have a choice. I suspect that, in the coming weeks, there will be a great deal of debate about the climate emergency. The challenge that the Parliament faces is how we deliver a net zero economy and how we create jobs so that the issue that the member is raising is addressed.

There are a number of ways in which we can do that, but we need to be more ambitious. We need to look at how we retrofit homes in the way that the Government is speaking about. That should be delivered by councils on a universal basis, which would address not just the challenge of the climate emergency but the rising cost of fuel and the cost of living crisis that many people have to live with. As Monica Lennon said, a publicly owned energy company should be central to our energy strategy.

Job creation and decentralisation go hand in hand. Liam Kerr referred to one particular bit of evidence, but there is a great deal of evidence that green policies create a huge number of jobs.

As we approach COP26, Scotland needs to lead the way. The Parliament needs to put out a very clear message—on a cross-party basis, I hope—that we must be more ambitious and decisive and that we need faster action. I call on the Scottish Government to heed those calls. I believe that, in the coming weeks, there will be many people on the streets making that challenge. We need to live up to that and do what is required for the sake of humanity.

16:44

Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): I thank the Scottish Government for securing this important debate. I will focus on the role of communities in our ambitions to be a net zero nation.

“A climate resilient Scotland requires urgent transformational action and must be done in a fair and just way that leaves no one, and no community, behind”.

That is a line from the Government’s motion today.

Yesterday, I had a meeting with my constituent Philip Revell, who is the convener of the Scottish Communities Climate Action Network. Along with Rosie Harrison, he leads ELCAN—the East Lothian Climate Action Network—in my constituency. Philip was part of the transition town network, which 15 years ago recognised the urgent need to change our way of life. At that time, he and others started Sustaining Dunbar, of which I was a trustee.

Philip and I have been discussing what a local wellbeing economy would look like. He sent the following thoughts, with which I agree:

“We need a rapid transformation to a wellbeing economy. Individual wellbeing is intimately connected to being part of a stronger, empowered community. Covid demonstrated how small-scale community initiatives can spring up rapidly, and have the agility, local knowledge and connections to quickly innovate solutions to meet local needs.”

In the same way, the new wellbeing economy can be built from the bottom up. On a small scale, new ideas and approaches can be quickly prototyped and refined. Through networking, such approaches can then be picked up, adapted and replicated to bring about rapid transformation.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

Paul McLennan: Apologies—I am short of time. I have only four minutes to get through my speech.

We have a good understanding of what basic infrastructure each community needs for local wellbeing economies to emerge. We need to remove barriers to local action and ensure that our communities have access to the resources that they need.

Our transition should be based on five key principles. The first is dignity and everyone having enough to live in comfort, safety, and happiness. Transition must be included in that. The second is nature, including having a restored and safe natural world for all life. The third is connection, being a sense of belonging and institutions that serve the common good. The fourth is fairness through having justice in all its dimensions at the heart of economic systems, and the gap between the richest and poorest being greatly reduced. The final principle is participation, which is very important.

Finlay Carson: Will the member take a short intervention on that point?

Paul McLennan: No. I am sorry, but I need to get through this. I have four minutes, and I am conscious of the time.

With participation, citizens are actively engaged in their communities and locally rooted economies. Relocalisation of our economy provides huge opportunities to achieve multiple goals and provide numerous, meaningful and creative livelihoods.

Back in 2014, SCCAN members distilled a vision of what a relocalised future would look like. What do our communities need to do to act? Community organising involves using the time of experienced and skilled development staff to engage and link across communities. We have heard about local energy economies and about trusted, knowledgeable energy advisers providing

detailed, tailored advice on retrofitting homes. We need local food economies, including access to land and workspace for local food processing and distribution. Local enterprise, with accessible and locally appropriate support that is focused on the planning and development of social and community enterprise and community wealth building, is also required.

We need networks that support our local communities in moving towards transition, as well as strong links to properly resourced regional and national networks for mutual support and inspiration.

We have many fantastic people such as Philip in our communities, who work alongside local and national Government. Our local communities are key to delivering a net zero Scotland; let us support them as best we can on our journey.

16:48

Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con):

The reannounced circular economy bill is an opportunity to make serious progress towards net zero. Even if the bill is some time away, we must urgently explore the issues that it should tackle, such as the growing problem of plastic pollution, which risks exacerbating climate change, weakening ecosystems and damaging economies. Just 2 per cent of the plastic waste that is collected in Scotland is recycled here. Let us build a new plastic recycling facility to use our waste as a resource while providing green jobs.

We can do the same for textiles. Scotland has no significant textile recycling facilities, so let us build them. We should also use more native fibres in our textiles industry. With the right help, our farmers can grow the relevant crops, such as nettles, and create a vibrant closed-loop industry with a smaller environmental footprint.

The new textiles innovation fund is a welcome start—I hope that it will make up lost ground after the Scottish National Party's abandonment of Zero Waste Scotland's textile programme and the Love Your Clothes campaign.

However, in our push to net zero, we must be alert to unintended consequences. The SNP has abruptly ended support for oil and liquefied petroleum gas heating systems, instead of phasing out support in good order. That means that those in fuel poverty are likely to suffer, especially people in rural communities where those heating systems are the only realistic option in the short term.

The SNP is set to miss its fuel poverty target, having missed its previous target. I urge ministers to look again at the issue. Net zero must not come at the price of pushing people into fuel poverty.

I also urge ministers to consider raising the cap on floating offshore wind innovation projects, so that the Marine Scotland innovation and targeted oil and gas decarbonisation plan is increased from 100MW to 300MW, to ensure that Scottish projects are competitive with those in England and Wales, and are not disadvantaged in future contracts for difference auctions. I hope that the minister will deal with that point in her closing speech.

The SNP-Green coalition must work with others and admit it when its plan is not working. For example, more than two thirds of the Government's climate change policies are off track; it has failed to meet its emissions targets for three years running; it has failed to meet 11 international biodiversity targets; and our recycling rate is worse now than it was five years ago.

Instead of implementing a landfill ban, the SNP-Green coalition is burning rubbish. Incineration capacity for household waste is skyrocketing towards 2.1 million tonnes a year. Perversely, if recycling increases, there might not be enough domestic waste left to burn. The SNP-Green coalition could end up importing rubbish to keep the incinerators running, turning Scotland into the waste dump of Europe.

If the Government tries to shut incinerators, taxpayers could end up footing the bill. Lorna Slater has already admitted in a written response that incinerator operators are not required to fund full decommissioning costs.

The coalition is proving worse than woeful on the environment. How is the public supposed to believe that there will be a just transition or that we will even reach net zero at all?

16:52

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP):

Taking action on climate change is the biggest challenge that we, as a Parliament, our children and our communities will face for years to come. We must act now to help minimise Scotland's contribution to climate change. We must restore as much nature and green space as we can and enhance our climate resilience in a just and fair way.

As Glasgow hosts COP26, the spotlight will be on Scotland. We should use the opportunity to highlight the steps that we are taking to achieve net zero. The programme for government outlines our plans for achieving net zero and we must ensure that we can take bold steps to get there. We simply cannot wait any longer. We must act now, as there is so much at stake.

As a Parliament, we should all be working in our constituencies to bring people along with us on our

journey to net zero, whether that is through the decarbonisation of transport links—as is happening in my constituency through the actions of First Bus and Stagecoach—through reducing heat loss from properties with the Scottish Government’s warmer homes Scotland initiative, or through free bus travel for the under-22s.

We are also establishing a fair fares review—that is a bit of a tongue twister—of the discounts and concessionary schemes that are available on all transport modes. We need to consider options against a background in which car travel costs are declining and public transport costs are increasing. Public transport should be affordable and accessible for all, and investing in our communities is key to help us achieve our goals.

We also need to take steps to reduce our carbon footprint. Encouraging the use of active travel is of great benefit—the Scottish Government is investing 10 per cent of its transport budget in that.

In our first 100 days, the Government has already established 12-month pilot projects to deliver free bikes to school-age children who cannot afford them. The pilots will inform how the Government can roll out the scheme nationally.

The Scottish Government has committed to maintaining the cycle repair scheme, thereby ensuring that bikes remain in a roadworthy condition and helping to renovate old bikes to get folk back out on the roads—although I will probably not be one of them, as I am not very good at riding a bike. That is a welcome announcement as we seek to establish an active freeway network in Scotland that utilises existing local networks and links major destinations—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry, but I will not take an intervention. I am short on time—I have only four minutes.

Renewables will play a key role in our move to net zero, and I welcome the Scottish Government’s continued commitment to a green recovery. It has committed more than £9 billion over this session of Parliament to environmental sustainability and the transition to net zero.

By summer 2022, the Scottish Government will establish a new global renewable centre, working with our international development partner countries to exchange knowledge and research in renewable technologies. In addition, there is an ambition to increase the gigawatt output from our offshore wind turbines to create enough energy to power more than 8 million homes. I just love seeing the turbines from the beaches of Aberdeen. The first cycle of ScotWind leasing is under way, with new projects coming online later this decade.

I see that I am running out of time, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Yes—you are running out of time.

Jackie Dunbar: I will finish off, if I can.

In our move to net zero, we simply cannot leave anyone behind, whether that be our communities or the industries in which we work. Our journey to net zero must be a just one, taking communities with us, engaging with them—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Dunbar. I am sorry, but we are very tight for time. I call Mark Ruskell—you have up to four minutes, Mr Ruskell.

16:56

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): I will focus my brief comments on the global emergency that gets the least attention: the nature emergency. It is a real supertanker of a crisis—it first has to be slowed down and then turned around, while all the while climate change is accelerating many of the catastrophic global biodiversity declines. The full restoration of nature cannot happen overnight; it will require changes that unravel centuries of exploitation and degradation. Traditions will need to be challenged and transitions will need to be just.

We need a clear vision that is backed up by legally binding targets, resources and new partnerships that are committed to delivering change on the ground. For years, meaningful action on the nature emergency has, for many Governments, been in the too-difficult-to-do box. Vested interests have resisted change; reforms have been slow or non-existent; agencies have often been too cautious; and the status quo has won out time and time again.

Change is long overdue, but the agreement between Green MSPs and the Scottish Government marks a fresh starting point for the regeneration and recovery of nature. Setting those legally binding nature targets will be critical in driving the change further and faster, and they must reach across every area of Government policy, from agriculture to fisheries, to planning and beyond. Ahead of the environment bill that is coming to Parliament, it is critical that the boots on the ground start delivering today. There should be no delay in the action that is needed. The nature restoration fund that the Greens secured in the budget earlier this year is already making a big difference, and will be dramatically expanded with multiyear funding. The demand is there for projects at a landscape scale that can truly deliver.

In the summer, I visited RSPB Insh Marshes, on the Spey, and I was blown away by the diversity of the wildlife there. I was also struck by how reserves such as Insh Marshes can be

strengthened if they are part of much larger networks of linked habitats across catchments and regions. Regional land use partnerships have a key role in that regard, and they need to be rolled out further. Yes, they need to be guided by local decision making, but they also need crystal-clear objectives to enable them to deliver on national targets for climate and nature. Growing those nature networks will be critical. With initiatives from pollinator superhighways to farm woodland corridors, we can join up fragmented habitats and embed them in the national planning framework.

The commitment in the agreement to deliver 10 per cent of our seas as highly protected marine areas, removing all damaging activities, will be significant. However, there remains a wider problem with the inshore, which needs to be tackled. Capping activities that damage the seabed within 3 nautical miles of the shore is a step in the right direction, but if the evidence shows that that is not effective, the exclusion of dredging and trawling must be an option in the future.

Marine protected areas must be meaningful. They will not deliver as mere lines on a map; they must come with strong plans for management and enforcement. Aquaculture needs major reform to address the multitude of environmental and animal welfare problems that are associated with it. The Griggs review, which will come to the Parliament soon, must deliver reforms that address the concerns that many coastal communities have with the current regulatory and planning framework. There will be a need to apply just transition principles. For example, conversations with the scallop dredging sector about its future need to start now, and farms in the uplands must be supported to deliver—

Finlay Carson: Will Mark Ruskell take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mark Ruskell will conclude shortly.

Mark Ruskell: Farms in the uplands must be supported to deliver the changes in land use that are needed to tackle the climate and nature emergencies while keeping people on the land.

The Green-Scottish Government agreement provides the right vision and concrete actions to restore the environment. I look forward to the Government hitting the ground running.

17:01

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): Climate change is the biggest threat that we face as a society. As we all know, the COP26 climate conference will come to Glasgow in just six weeks' time. It will, I hope, act as the catalyst for a new

climate agreement, for bolder and more ambitious carbon reduction targets, and for the ratification of our transition to a future in which renewables are at the heart of our energy supply mix.

That being said, although we should be heralding a new dawn of renewable technologies with the benefits that they bring, I fear that we have missed the greatest opportunity to be presented to us in generations, because of the loss of the skills and industrial base that are required to capitalise on our natural assets. For years, we have watched wind farms appear on the horizon while jobs disappear into the sunset. We see examples of that across the board, with offshore behemoths such as the Neart na Gaoithe wind farm off the coast of Fife having been manufactured largely in Indonesia, while the Harland and Wolff yard in Methil—just 10 miles away—receives a subcontract for just 15 per cent of the steel jacket foundations that are needed. The 54 highly complex Siemens Gamesa turbines will be manufactured entirely abroad.

There has been a failure of public planning and a tacit acceptance that market forces will continue to dictate our renewables future. There is a mentality that is hard-wired into the civil service and all levels of government, which is why there is no fit-for-purpose industrial strategy. There is no plan to combine decarbonisation with opportunity, energy security with financial certainty, or untapped potential with economic prosperity. It is tragic to watch skilled workers broken in the face of that. I witnessed it at the Caley railway works in Springburn just two years ago, and now Scotland—once the world's largest manufacturer of locomotives—has no domestic capability to build and maintain its own trains.

Until we reach a point at which we can say to everyone in this country that they will genuinely benefit from our transition to a green economy, we will fail to take them with us. That is why we need the state-owned energy company that the Government promised before scrapping it, and it is why we need to stop offshoring industrial manufacturing and technology contracts for renewables projects in Scotland. That should have been done years ago, but inaction, lack of imagination, and absence of ambition have led us to where we are today.

It is a lack of imagination that sees Transport Scotland and the Scottish Government about to blindly spend hundreds of millions of pounds on reconstructing concrete M8 viaducts that have scarred central Glasgow for 50 years at the expense of new active travel routes in the city. Just think of the message that that sends to the world in the year of COP26: the largest infrastructure spend in the city in decades will be the propping up and repairing of a defunct

motorway. Why not spend that money on greener alternatives, especially when no new railway lines have been constructed in Glasgow during the past 15 years of this Government? We are now at the absurd point at which ScotRail is cutting 300 services a day from its timetable, and the cabinet secretary is scratching his head and wondering why more people are using their cars.

We need a Government with ambition that matches the scale of the challenges that we face, that is willing to face down global market forces and say, "Enough," and that commits to an industrial strategy with workers and communities at its heart. We need a Government that provides everyone with the opportunity to benefit from our transition to renewables. Is this Government up to that challenge?

17:05

Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP): I spoke in last week's debate on making Scotland a fairer and more equal country. Today's debate ties in with that. It is so important that our transition to net zero leaves no one behind.

Climate change provides an opportunity to drive social justice. Good quality, zero carbon housing is essential in that endeavour. In addition to funding the building of thousands of new homes, the Scottish Government is stepping up investment in heat decarbonisation and home energy efficiency measures. Those investments should lead to large reductions in fuel poverty in the future. However, we must tackle that now. The Scottish Government's commitment to make around £0.5 billion available to support those in fuel poverty during the heat transition is therefore welcome.

Transport is the largest source of greenhouse gases in Scotland. To achieve a reduction in car use, we must ensure that there is good and affordable public transport. The programme for government mentions the continued investment in decarbonising Scotland's railway, including the electrification of the East Kilbride line. That major investment will lead to a better service for passengers, with longer, greener, quieter trains, and it will help to reduce overall transport emissions.

The transition to a low carbon economy will come with challenges, but there is also an opportunity for Scotland to lead the way. Although I am biased, I believe that East Kilbride can play an important part in that. Coca-Cola Europacific Partners begins production of 100 per cent recycled plastic bottles this month, saving thousands of tonnes of new, non-recycled plastic across the country. Excel Vending produces reverse vending machines that will be extremely useful when the deposit return scheme is

introduced. TÜV SÜD has experience in the oil and gas sector but it is now developing new technologies to help build a net zero nation, including work relating to a new domestic gas metre for hydrogen.

Those three companies in East Kilbride are not only helping to reduce waste and cut emissions, they all pay the real living wage as a minimum. There is great potential for new green jobs that deliver fair wages. The Scottish Government's commitment to a green jobs workforce academy will, I hope, encourage more people to train or retrain and to reap the benefits that a just transition can bring.

I will mention another initiative as we work to transform Scotland: 20-minute neighbourhoods. East Kilbride can offer a good example of what we should aspire to, given that most of its housing areas have a local square with shops and services to meet residents' daily needs. Greenhills Square has a church, library, post office, shops and restaurants, a GP surgery, dentist and pharmacy. There is a regular bus service to the square and there are two primary schools and a nursery. East Kilbride is not only about roundabouts; there are squares too.

Local shops and services, good public transport and energy-efficient homes will be invaluable as Scotland becomes a net zero nation. We are delivering lasting action to secure that future and we will do it in a fair and just way that leaves no one behind.

17:09

Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab): The motion seeks to paint a picture of a Scotland that has not endured 14 years of inaction and broken promises at the hands of this Government. In June, we saw the consequences of that continuing inaction from the Scottish Government when it failed to meet its target for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and it has allowed emissions from domestic transport to reach worryingly high levels. At this rate, Scotland will struggle to meet its 2045 net zero target without significant intervention.

The Scottish Government is also failing to meet its targets on renewable energy. The latest figures show that just 24 per cent of current energy consumption is coming from renewables. With energy bills set to rise for households across Scotland, the Scottish Government's failure to deliver a publicly owned, not-for-profit energy company is unforgivable. However, it is not too late for it to reconsider. A publicly owned energy company that produces local energy as well as supplying it could reduce costs for consumers and

direct investment into much-needed green technologies.

The motion rightly recognises the need to deliver a just transition. That is particularly important to the workers and communities that I represent in the north-east. At First Minister's question time two weeks ago, I challenged the First Minister to consider introducing an offshore training passport. Last week, I received a response from the just transition minister that avoided giving a firm commitment to introducing such a passport. Warm words are not enough. We need practical solutions.

One such solution would be to expand the role of the Energy Skills Alliance, which is developing an all energy apprenticeship. That is good for new entrants, but it does not help the current workforce. However, that work by the ESA suggests that standardised training for the energy sector is possible. Will the Scottish Government consider tasking the ESA with developing an offshore training passport as part of a wider, all-energy training programme for the existing workforce?

I do not know whether the cabinet secretary wants to intervene on that. As I asked a question, I think that I should give way if he wants to answer it.

Michael Matheson: Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I ask the member to resume her seat if she is giving way, and I will then call the cabinet secretary.

Mercedes Villalba: Sorry, Presiding Officer.

Michael Matheson: I am grateful to the member for giving way. I recognise the important point that she makes about the skills transition and the potential role that a skills passport can play in that. I will take away the point that she made about the ESA and the potential role that it could play in helping to inform the process, and I will ensure that she gets a detailed response on that from the minister who is responsible for the just transition.

Mercedes Villalba: I thank the cabinet secretary. I am sorry if I did that wrong, Presiding Officer.

On transport, the Scottish Government's motion emphasises the need to reduce car dependency, but its current actions undermine that aim, because Scotland's railways are set to face cuts to services that will put them at below pre-pandemic levels. Scotland's bus network is still run for private profit and not to meet passengers' needs. Entire communities face cuts to routes and will be left without reliable services. On top of that, the Scottish Government is set to spend millions on

the M8 motorway just weeks before Glasgow is due to host COP26.

The Scottish Government must do everything in its power to tackle the climate and biodiversity emergencies. The truth is that it is not doing that. It is missing its energy and renewables targets and dragging its feet on delivering sustainable transport. Labour is offering constructive solutions, which is why our amendment calls for the creation of a publicly owned energy company. It is also why I have outlined a practical solution to help to deliver a just transition for offshore oil and gas workers.

If the Scottish Government is serious about delivering the urgent action that is needed, it will back the Labour amendment.

17:14

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I am delighted to be closing the debate on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives. As I said last week, the climate emergency is one that we just cannot ignore.

In taking part in today's debate, we must remember that we do so against the backdrop of an ever-increasing global population, rising energy demand, the continued deforestation of our planet, the increase in pollution from the burning of coal in countries such as India and China, and the increase in pollution from discarded waste, such as the mountains of plastics that we see in our seas and oceans. We should never forget that we are talking about a global problem that requires global collaboration.

The UK Government's hosting of COP26 in Glasgow is a huge opportunity for Scotland to showcase what can be done through leading by example. Therefore, I will start with what the Scottish Government is really good at. It leads the world in setting targets—it is absolutely world class in generating headlines from those ambitious targets—but, as Maurice Golden said at the start of his speech, in probably the most important statement that can be made, inaction has become the greatest threat to our net zero efforts. Like Liam Kerr, Maurice cut straight to the chase, highlighting all the areas in which the SNP Government's talk is not matched by its actions or outcomes.

Just 2 per cent of our plastic is recycled in Scotland, yet the Scottish Government continues to allow an increase in incineration capacity. That is not compatible with a net zero target. The Scottish Government wanted to end landfill by 2021, yet here we are in September 2021 with no sign of an end to landfill and no clear path to it. That is not compatible with a net zero target. Procuring and processing food locally is a great

way to reduce the carbon footprint, yet in schools and hospitals the greatest percentage of our food is procured from abroad despite the fact that our farmers produce some of the highest-quality food in the world. That is not compatible with a net zero target.

The Scottish Government told us that there would be 28,000 new green jobs by 2020. Only 1,400 have been realised. Renewable energy technology has been imported, along with all the servicing contracts. Why do we not build our wind turbines in Scotland? Paul Sweeney made that point. Why are we not linking our education sector with the future jobs market? It is ridiculous that we need to import those skills.

Michael Matheson: Will the member give way on that point?

Brian Whittle: I will let the cabinet secretary in once I have finished my list of all his Government's failings.

Burntisland Fabrications and Ferguson Marine had ambitions to build turbines, but then the Scottish Government stepped in and created an almighty mess. Speaking of Ferguson Marine, we must not forget the fiasco of the MV Glen Sannox and hull 802, the great hopes for the future of Scotland's ferry fleet, which are over budget and overdue. It is a staggering mess. It now seems that a yard that is owned by the Scottish Government cannot even make the shortlist for a Scottish Government tender. That is not compatible with a net zero target.

Michael Matheson: On the member's point about the challenges for the renewables sector—in particular, the onshore renewables sector—is he aware that the biggest negative impact on securing onshore wind jobs in Scotland was caused by the UK Government's withdrawing the subsidy for the programme? That, in itself, cost thousands of jobs across the sector.

Brian Whittle: I wonder whether the cabinet secretary is aware of the number of wind turbines in Scotland, especially in my area, that were built abroad. We had the opportunity to build them in Scotland but, as I said, the Scottish Government stepped in and completely destroyed the two companies that could have built wind turbines. *[Interruption.]* It is right to say that it is a mess, and it is tempting to say that the SNP Government is all at sea with those issues, but of course that would require it to successfully build a boat.

Net zero requires a transition to clean energy at the fastest practical and sustainable rate. It will require innovation, and I suggest that the solutions that will ultimately make the step changes that we need are yet to be developed. It is therefore crucial that research and development and innovation are encouraged and supported by

Governments. The organisations that have the largest R and D budgets—those that are investing the most in renewable energy—happen to be in the oil and gas sector. They have known for some time that their business model had to change, and they have been doing that.

For example, Lightsource bp will more than double its global solar expansion by 2025 in a deal worth \$1.8 billion to develop enough solar farms to power the equivalent of 8.4 million homes, which will turbocharge its capacity to 25GW by 2025. Oil and gas companies are investing in hybrid engines for aviation; green and blue hydrogen; offshore wind; tidal energy; and pumped storage. They are rapidly changing their model.

We will still require the oil and gas industry—as, I think, we all agree—because the petrochemical industry is not just about fossil fuel. However, as we witnessed last week, there are those in Government, especially the Greens, who want to shut business down.

Graham Simpson rightly highlighted that the way in which transport is developed will be significant in tackling climate change. Contrary to what the Greens have said—that road building is a threat to climate change—building roads is not the problem; it is about what we put on them. In fact, upgrading infrastructure in the south-west would significantly benefit the environment by taking all the heavy goods vehicles out of towns and villages, which would ensure that journeys were much less stop-start and far more economical.

We should be creating an electric hydrogen superhighway that connects the south-west—including the port of Cairnryan—with the central belt to the north and the rest of Great Britain to the south. The rail link from Ayr to Stranraer is woefully inadequate and in desperate need of upgrading. However, as Liam Kerr pointed out, there is not even a rail link north of Aberdeen to Peterhead and Fraserburgh. The development of rural infrastructure is key to not leaving anybody behind; developing that infrastructure, as well as options for active travel such as cycle routes, should be part of that plan.

The Greens should be the conscience of the Parliament, as they are across Europe. They should be leading the critique of the Scottish Government's woeful record in its drive to net zero; instead, they propose policies that have only a passing acquaintance with reality and which present a risk to a genuinely sustainable green economic recovery. Not content with that, for the small price of a couple of taxpayer-funded ministerial positions, they are content to prop up an SNP Government whose contribution to climate change is mostly hot air.

There is so much positive change that the Scottish Government could make to make a significant inroad into the climate change emergency. However, when outcomes are all that matter, and while the SNP Government continues to fall short, we will continue to call it out and put forward better alternatives. As JFK once said,

“Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other.”

With its head-in-the-sand approach, the SNP has shown that it has the capability neither to learn nor to lead. If we are to achieve net zero, that will have to change.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Lorna Slater to wind up for the Scottish Government.

17:21

The Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity (Lorna Slater): I thank all members for their excellent contributions to today’s debate. I will refer to as many as possible in the time that is available, although there have been so many excellent contributions that I might miss a few.

Today’s debate has reaffirmed the need for transformative action to address the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss. The crises are intrinsically linked: climate change is a key driver of biodiversity loss, while a thriving natural environment has a vital role in removing carbon from the atmosphere. Both crises stem from the earth’s systems being stretched beyond their sustainable limits. The same urgency that we attach to tackling climate change is now also needed to address the biodiversity crisis.

Global reports show that the health of the planet’s ecosystems is deteriorating faster now than it has at any time in history. The “State of Nature 2019 Scotland” report highlights that 49 per cent of Scotland’s species have decreased in abundance over the past 20 years and that one in nine species is threatened with extinction.

Maurice Golden: The minister made a valid point about biodiversity loss and the failure of the SNP Government to meet its own targets on that. Will the minister commit to reducing and removing support from the SNP if the SNP-Green coalition also fails to meet its biodiversity targets?

Lorna Slater: Biodiversity sits within my portfolio. Maurice Golden is welcome to hold me accountable in the chamber for our delivery on that matter.

Urgent action is needed to address the drivers of biodiversity loss. We need to change how we use and manage land in order that we can stop the damage to nature that is caused by intensive agriculture, overexploitation and pollution, and so

that we can reduce waste and excessive consumption.

By taking action now, we can transform our country for the better. Protecting and enhancing our natural environment and biodiversity is vital for our future economic prosperity and our communities’ wellbeing.

Finlay Carson: Will the minister take an intervention?

Lorna Slater: Let me finish this paragraph.

So many of the jobs in the future rural economy will depend on Scotland’s nature being resilient and abundant. Scaling up peatland restoration, sustainable agriculture and tourism, and planting more native woodlands—so called nature-based solutions—can make a significant contribution to Scotland meeting its emissions targets. Nature is our ally—an essential ally—in helping Scotland to cut our emissions and create a low-carbon economy.

Finlay Carson: The Scottish Conservatives consider that wind power should form part of our future energy generation. That said, in recent months, despite 13 wind farm applications being rejected by communities in Dumfries and Galloway, nine were then approved by the Scottish Government, with only four objections having been upheld. Those applications received more than 1,900 objections.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Could you come to your question, please, Mr Carson?

Finlay Carson: Given the minister’s comments on community wellbeing, are there enough wind farms in Galloway? Yes or no?

Lorna Slater: I cannot comment on specific applications in a particular area. We absolutely want wind energy to be part of the mix for a sustainable future.

Investing in solutions for biodiversity and nature recovery will create sustainable employment and innovative business opportunities. There are potentially thousands of green jobs and skills opportunities to be developed and realised. That is particularly relevant for remote rural and island communities.

It is essential that we invest in our education and skills systems to ensure that we are well placed to take full advantage of the opportunities that are arising. That is why we are taking forward a root-and-branch review of land-based education, to identify opportunities to promote the excellent career opportunities in our land-based sectors. The review will have a key focus on exploring how we can redress the inequalities in land-based sectors, and it will look especially at how we might

encourage more women to take up careers in those sectors.

I was pleased to hear my Conservative colleagues Liam Kerr and Brian Whittle push so firmly for climate action and traffic reduction. I clarify that we are not demanding that everyone drive an electric car. A 20 per cent reduction in traffic is a key target. I am sure that the members will reflect on the fact that merely changing to electric and hydrogen vehicles does nothing to reduce traffic, so investment in active travel, buses and railways is the way to deliver on the target.

Liam Kerr: The cabinet secretary mentioned STPR2. Have the remit and criteria of STPR2 changed since the Green Party entered the coalition?

Lorna Slater: No.

I thank Monica Lennon for lodging her amendment and for bringing up the following issue during the debate, and I thank Mercedes Villalba and Willie Rennie for their contributions on it. The public sector has a key role to play in the transition to a net zero energy system that is affordable and reliable. The new national public energy agency will help to deliver that by co-ordinating investment and supporting national, regional and local government delivery of heat decarbonisation and roll-out of energy efficiency by working closely with the public and private sectors and the third sector. Monica Lennon and other Labour colleagues might be interested to hear that the co-operation agreement explicitly commits to support for alternative ownership models, including co-operatives and social enterprises.

Monica Lennon: I congratulate Lorna Slater on her appointment. In June, before she became a minister, she urged the Scottish Government to get on with delivering a public energy company. I think that it is fair to say that a commitment to an agency is a downgrade. Has the minister's position changed? Will she vote for the Labour amendment?

Lorna Slater: The Scottish Government recognises that there has been a significant change in the wider policy landscape and energy market in recent months. The climate emergency has been announced, we have set new and ambitious net zero targets, and the energy market has been hit by multiple supplier failures, rising consumer debt and volatile energy prices. A different approach is required.

Monica Lennon and several other members mentioned the gas price crisis, which I agree is a consequence of slow action to reduce our society's dependence on fossil fuels, which have a long history of price uncertainty and shocks. In Scotland, we need locally generated reliable sources of energy. It is unfortunate that, in 2015,

Conservative Prime Minister Theresa May ended market support for offshore renewables such as tidal energy. Tidal energy is predictable, reliable and eternal. Thanks to that support being stopped, Scotland is six years behind where we could have been in building and installing tidal turbines in Scotland. *[Interruption.]* I need to carry on.

The programme for government commits to investment in marine renewables, with the intention of having a reliable long-term supply of energy.

I thank Fiona Hyslop and Mercedes Villalba for their comments about skills. Green skills are part of my portfolio, so I am interested in looking into offshore passports—they are on my radar—and other elements of the skills programme that the members mentioned.

I am really pleased that Graham Simpson supports our ends, even if we might disagree about the means. I very much welcome his call for segregated cycle lanes everywhere. My colleague Patrick Harvie will be delighted to hear that he supports such an approach. It is, unfortunately, the case that widening roads does not reduce traffic congestion, regardless of whether vehicles have electric motors or diesel engines. However, the member identified an excellent business opportunity for manufacturing in Scotland, in the building and scaling up of low-carbon buses. That is exactly the sort of economic opportunity that tackling the climate crisis brings.

I thank Elena Whitham for bringing up regenerative farming. I have long seen farming as being a big part of the solution to the climate and nature emergencies. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry, but I cannot take an intervention, as I have a lot of members' comments to get through.

I say to Katy Clark that I am a member of Unite the union. She is quite right to push the Scottish Government on green jobs and the needs of the workers. The 350,000 jobs that she mentioned in her speech chime with other findings on the enormous potential for jobs in energy, sustainable farming, forestry, installing the segregated cycle lanes that Graham Simpson has called for and, of course, upgrading Scotland's homes to make them warmer and greener.

Although challenges remain before us, there are real and lasting opportunities for Scotland to grasp in finding practical solutions to tackle the twin crises of the climate emergency and the nature emergency. That will require a whole-Government approach and, I would argue, a whole-Parliament approach. The reward for that will be a greener and fairer Scotland that has the natural environment truly at the heart of its prosperity.

Decision Time

17:31

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is decision time. There are three questions to be put as a result of today's business.

The first question is, that amendment S6M-01293.1, in the name of Liam Kerr, which seeks to amend motion S6M-01293, in the name of Michael Matheson, on a net zero nation, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

There will be a short suspension to allow members to access the digital voting system.

17:31

Meeting suspended.

17:37

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: Members may cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

The Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport (Michael Matheson): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Unfortunately, the app did not work on this occasion. I would have voted against the amendment.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Matheson. We will ensure that your vote is recorded.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)

Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)

Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-01293.1, in the name of Liam Kerr, is: For 50, Against 66, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-01293.3, in the name of Monica Lennon, which seeks to amend motion S6M-01293, in the name of Michael Matheson, on a net zero nation, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)

Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Doney, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)

Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-01293.3, in the name of Monica Lennon, is: For 19, Against 97, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S6M-01293, in the name of Michael Matheson, on a net zero nation, is agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is now closed.

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app looks like it has crashed and I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: I confirm that your vote was recorded.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)

Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 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)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

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)
 Dowe, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-01293, in the name of Michael Matheson, on a net zero nation, is: For 88, Against 26, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Government must do everything in its power to tackle the escalating climate and nature emergencies and deliver a just transition for all; notes the recent UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report and the need for Scotland to advance determinedly to decarbonise homes, buildings, energy, industry and transport, and to restore, protect and enhance the natural environment and its assets; welcomes, therefore, the Scottish Government's commitments in this area, which include investing at least £1.8 billion in zero carbon buildings during the current parliamentary session, achieving a 20% reduction in car kilometres by 2030 and setting targets for species protection in a nature recovery bill; agrees that the transition to a low-carbon economy and a climate resilient Scotland requires urgent transformational action and must be done in a fair and just way that leaves no one, and no community, behind, and recognises that there are also significant opportunities for Scotland to lead the way globally in finding solutions.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Brain Injury in Football

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): I remind members that Covid-related measures are still in place in the chamber and around the Holyrood campus and that face coverings should be worn when moving around the chamber and accessing your seat.

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-01042, in the name of Michael Marra, on action on brain injury in football. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament understands that an increasing number of ex-footballers in the North East Scotland region and across the country are making public a diagnosis regarding brain injury, and that a growing research base highlights the increased risk of such injury that professional players face; notes the view that the sport's governing bodies must take swift action to support former players and protect those currently involved in the game; further notes calls for such conditions among footballers to be considered as an industrial injury; recognises the campaigning by PFA Scotland, the GMB and other organisations regarding this, and notes calls for a working group to be established to consider these issues, which should also focus on the grassroots game.

17:47

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): I thank the members from all five parties who supported the motion, and I thank my Labour colleagues for allowing me to lead the debate. That cross-party support is a small reminder of the universality of football—our national sport and national obsession. It is a force that can, at its best, bring unity and joy—the beautiful game.

A few years ago, headlines relating to the dementia suffered by a Scottish footballing great would have been shocking. Now, we see them every few weeks. The late, great Billy McNeill was a player who would have led any team in any era. His skill was considerable, but he was also a man who was blessed with strategic understanding, tactical cunning and a depth of emotional intelligence. He was articulate, funny and a born leader. We knew instinctively what the cause of his dementia had been.

From the snippets of news and the mention of Jeff Astle—that great header of the ball at West Bromwich Albion, who had suffered dementia—we had a vague idea that the number of diagnoses was growing. Now, we hear of them constantly. In recent weeks, Gordon Wallace, who scored Dundee's 1973 league cup winner, Gordon McQueen, who headed Scotland to victory at Wembley in 1977, and Denis Law—perhaps our greatest and most powerful centre forward—who

was dominant in the air for Manchester United and Scotland, have all gone public with their diagnoses. We will hear more in the weeks, months and years to come—that is now inevitable.

Those are just the ones we know about. Many families of household names choose to preserve their privacy and maintain their public dignity when dementia has stripped them of so much. There are also those whose names would not command headlines but who played and entertained—and loved the game—and who now suffer.

The results of the research undertaken by Dr Willie Stewart of the University of Glasgow are clear. A professional goalkeeper has the same chance of developing dementia as any citizen, a striker is three and a half times more likely to suffer, and a defender is five times more likely to suffer. Of his own diagnosis, Denis Law said:

“What else would it be? That was what caused damage to the brain. You were heading the ball, which was quite heavy in those days, but you didn’t think about it. We just thought it was normal.”

We must be clear that this is not a debate about concussion. The medical condition we are discussing comes from repeated brain trauma from the repeated heading of a football on the pitch and in training. The striker Chris Sutton, who lost his beloved footballer father to dementia, estimates that his own repetitive trauma amounts to heading the ball 70,000 times during his career. Chris has backed the campaign and is calling on Scotland to show leadership.

Put simply, for a generation of our greats, this is injury time—and time is running out. Our injury time campaign, which was launched on Sunday, before the Dundee derby, has three demands for the Scottish Government and Scottish footballing authorities: first, classify brain injury in football as an industrial injury; secondly, fund research into the practical and preventative support that is needed in the game; and thirdly, establish a working group to consider issues around brain injury and dementia, including in the grass-roots game.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I have a great interest in this subject, which I spoke about in the previous session of Parliament. Would the member agree that there is a lot more research to be done, especially around the impact on those who are under 16, when bone density is not fully developed, and around advancements in technology? For instance, he mentioned the heaviness of the ball. There is a lot more research to be done on that. Perhaps the way forward is to stop under-16s from heading the ball in training, as has been done in the United States.

Michael Marra: I certainly agree that a significant amount of further research is required.

Dr Willie Stewart, whom I met last week, compared the repeated heading of the ball to the punches from a sparring partner in boxing repeatedly, every day, all day in training. For a young person, some of the impact is just the same as it would be for an adult. Much more needs to be done to model the impact and to better understand it.

For under-12s, heading of the ball has already been prevented in training—it is now banned. As a youth football coach, I know that we do not do heading drills—players can head the ball in the game, but they do not have repeated drills. There is a big debate around young people. I will speak a little bit more about that and participation in it, so I thank Brian Whittle for the question.

For those who have been professionals and have suffered already, the main issue pertains to the idea of industrial injury. The Industrial Injuries Advisory Council advises United Kingdom ministers on which injuries should be recognised for industrial injuries disablement benefit. The benefit is devolved, but it is currently administered by the Department for Work and Pensions under an agency agreement.

In its paper entitled “COVID-19 and occupation: position paper 48”, on considering Covid as an occupational disease, the council noted:

“In considering the question of prescription the Council searches for a practical way to demonstrate in the individual case that the disease can be attributed to occupational exposure with reasonable confidence; for this purpose, ‘reasonable confidence’ is interpreted as being based on the balance of probabilities.”

In the instance that we are discussing, the balance-of-probabilities test has been met. The Scottish Government must classify dementia in former footballers as an industrial injury when it assumes responsibility for that benefit.

What of now? A generation of footballers who recently retired know that the same is coming for many of them. How can we best support them and advise them to take their own preventative action in the coming years? Urgent research is required on that issue. What of our children who love the game, such as my Riverside West End 2013s? Their passion for the game is unlike anything that I have ever seen. They dream of goals, and their joy when they score them lights me up.

We have banned heading for under-12s, but what happens next? What steps will we take to protect them? What of the women’s game? What can we do to ensure that protections are in place for women as their game continues its rapid, and very welcome, growth?

The wise old men of Mount Florida created the modern game by playing the ball on the ground. They passed it, rather than hoofing it long like their

English contemporaries. Had God intended football to be played in the air, he would have put grass in the clouds. Now may be the moment for Scotland to reinvent the game again, but let us start by honouring all the memories and the heroes who suffered for having entertained us.

I will close with the story of Frank Kopel and his widow Amanda, who first saw her childhood sweetheart at the age of 10, heading the ball against the wall of his house, hour after hour. She followed his career from Manchester United to my own club, Dundee United. She watched as he scored a goal for the ages against Anderlecht under the great Jim McLean. Amanda nursed Frankie through dementia, fought for justice for Frankie and for those who suffered as he did, and cradled Frankie in her arms as he breathed his last.

That is undoubtedly, indisputably, industrial injury. I hope that the Scottish Government recognises that tonight, so we can start the work of getting those men and their families the support that they deserve.

17:56

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): I thank Michael Marra for bringing the debate to the chamber. I have a rugby family, and for many years I have been a child protection officer for a local rugby club in Aberdeen, so I am sensitive to, and supportive of, the work to improve safety in sport.

As members will recall, I asked a question on this very issue earlier this month, following the news that Denis Law, Scotland's joint all-time leading football scorer, had confirmed his own diagnosis of mixed dementia. The beautiful game is an essential part of life for many generations of boys and girls: idolising their favourite players, posters on bedroom walls, stickers swapped at school, and players reinvented as characters in computer games. However, behind the glamour, football players are, first and foremost, human beings with friends and families who love and support them. I know the emotion that is felt when a pal, brother or father is diagnosed with dementia.

As an Aberdeen constituency MSP, my thoughts turn to two individuals in particular. The first is Jimmy Calderwood, who was Aberdeen team manager for five years during the 2000s and led the team into the latter stages of a European competition. Mr Calderwood went public with his own diagnosis of Alzheimer's in 2017, but he maintained a very positive attitude in managing his condition and enjoying life. I understand that he is open-minded on whether heading the ball may have been a factor behind his diagnosis.

Dons fans through the 1970s will remember Chic McLelland, who made more than 150 appearances for Aberdeen but sadly suffered from early-onset dementia for 10 years. I am aware that Mr McLelland's family believe that football may well have played a part in his diagnosis.

I note the research, to which Michael Marra referred, by Dr Willie Stewart, who found that former football players are three and a half times more likely to die of neurodegenerative disease in comparison with non-footballers. Outfield players are four times more likely to suffer from brain disease, and defenders—the position that Mr McLelland played—were found to be five times more likely to suffer from dementia.

Sadly, it would appear that Mr McLelland's family had good reason to believe that heading footballs contributed to his condition. Likewise, the risk for Mr Calderwood, having played as a midfielder, may have been increased.

The Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport, in answer to my question in the chamber, confirmed that the Scottish Government is

“in regular contact with the Scottish Football Association”,

and I was encouraged to hear that the Scottish Football Association has

“produced guidance ... on heading”—[*Official Report*, 2 September 2021; c 5.]

for clubs and coaches to follow.

It is reassuring to know that there is specific guidance for primary and secondary school children, so that future generations of footballers will not face the same risks as those in the past or, indeed, in the present. I also welcome the Scottish Government's plans to “substantially increase funding” for Scotland's national health service and social care system in order to ensure that older people, including football players who are living with dementia, receive the care that they need.

We all know how important it is to encourage people, especially children and young people, to participate in sporting activities. I commend the work of researchers in the field of brain injury and sport, as well as the many others who have helped to raise the profile of this important issue and have worked so hard to improve safety in football and similar sports. It is vital that that work is supported and continued.

I am pleased to support Michael Marra in bringing the issue to the Scottish Government's attention. I will follow developments very closely and will do what I can to ensure that work continues at not just a national but an international level.

18:00

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

The history of democracy in this country is one of converting privileges into rights—the right to equality, the right to access to the justice system, even the right to vote itself—and what all of that history tells us is that each generation has to fight many of the same battles over and over again. Just as our forebears fought for the recognition of asbestosis and mesothelioma as industrial diseases, of pneumoconiosis as being caused by hazardous working conditions and of deafness among factory workers as the result of a failed duty of care to them, so today we are fighting for recognition of the direct link between playing professional football and a dramatically heightened risk of dementia.

We will, no doubt, hear from the minister that we need more research and to prove—and prove absolutely—cause and effect, and she will tell us that she is exploring links and considering further inquiry. However, that is not going fast enough or far enough, and it is not good enough simply to say that we cannot act until we get more research. Enough of a link has been proven already. My question, therefore, is: how many families and former footballers are going to have to suffer before we see action? In my view, it can no longer be denied that there is a direct link between a career in football and a heightened risk of dementia. It might be the result of head impact, it might be the result of head injury, it might be neither or it might be both.

Of course, even in the grimmest of situations, humour can be found. I am reminded of a story by the late John Lambie. One of his Partick Thistle players was injured after a head knock, and when the physiotherapist shouted over to the bench, "He must be concussed, because he's asking who he is," Lambie shouted back, "Tell him he's Pelé and get him playing again!"

Of course, the serious point—and the powerful fact—is that the status of a professional footballer is different from that of an amateur. The players whom we are predominantly talking about in this debate were professional and so were party to a contract of employment. That meant that their employer had a duty of care to them, but it also meant that they were in a master-servant relationship. The relations of power were and still are very unequal, and that, for me, is the clinching argument.

Brian Whittle: I agree with a lot of what has been said. However, as we were discussing before in private, the issue, from a legal perspective, will be proving not that heading a ball

can cause or is a contributory factor to dementia but that it happened when the person in question was under a professional contract. How do we ensure that a professional footballer's career gets taken into account when a legal team might argue that the contributory factor came beforehand, when he was an amateur? How do we square that circle?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am very happy to recompense you for the time, Mr Leonard.

Richard Leonard: These problems are not insurmountable. Indeed, we faced them with mesothelioma and asbestosis. I will draw on a personal example of a friend of mine who worked in several industries as well as being in the Royal Navy. When his case came to court, the insurers of the employer he was pursuing said, "How do you know it's us? How do you know it's not the navy? How do you know it's not a former employer?" However, in the end, they conceded the ground and made the compensatory payment.

These are not insurmountable issues for any good personal injury lawyer to pursue and track down. It is pretty clear to me that the case that we are making tonight—the start, not the end, of a campaign—is worth pursuing.

The long-established industrial injuries disablement benefit will, under the Scotland Act 2016, be transferred to this Parliament—we hope as early as next year—in the shape of the devolved employment injury assistance payment. That makes this debate all the more relevant. We are at a juncture at which action can be taken and a decisive intervention can be made by the minister and the Scottish Government.

I say to the Government that, if it does not act, today will not be the end of this campaign—it will be the beginning of it.

18:05

Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con): I thank Michael Marra for bringing this important debate to the chamber.

I grew up playing youth football and then 22 seasons of amateur football, amassing around 800 games. Until recently, there was no indication or general awareness that every time a footballer headed the ball it could be contributing to permanent brain injury. That an action so central to the game could have such significant long-term consequences is deeply worrying.

I commend all the research that has been undertaken to shine a light on the issue, including that of Dr Stewart from the University of Glasgow, whose leading research found that professional footballers were up to five times more likely than

people in the general population to die of a degenerative brain disease.

Scottish footballers such as Billy McNeill, Denis Law, Gordon Wallace and countless others have been affected by the issue, and of course Frank Kopel's death from dementia led to the introduction of Frank's law, thanks to his wife Amanda's tireless campaigning. Amanda has now turned her attention to leading the injury time campaign that we are here to debate today. It is a call to action to which we must give serious attention.

When it comes to funding research into the practical and preventative support that is needed in the game, the Scottish football authorities and the Scottish Government have a leading role to play. However, this is a global issue that the sport faces and effective funding would be small change for the likes of FIFA, the Union of European Football Associations and the major leagues around the world. I call on them to do more.

I would very much support the establishment of a working group to consider the issues to do with brain injury and dementia, and I would particularly support the inclusion of the grass-roots game.

The impacts of brain injury are starting to be understood among ex-professional footballers—the people who were likely to be heading the ball with more frequency and ferocity than their recreational counterparts—but there are tens of thousands of Scots who play football at lower levels, for whom Saturday and Sunday football has been a way of life since childhood and sometimes well into their 40s and even 50s. For some of those people, particularly centre backs, the frequency of heading the ball might not be dissimilar to that of their professional counterparts.

The classification of brain injury in football as an industrial injury is an area on which I would like more detail. I would particularly like more detail on the nuances and impacts in the context of the lower levels of the professional, semi-professional and junior game.

Michael Marra: Does the member agree that there is an opportunity for the Scottish Government, as it establishes Social Security Scotland, to model a new approach? In the current circumstances, test cases and the kinds of legal action that Mr Whittle described are taken, but we could do things in a better and more dignified way in Scotland by considering the medical evidence in the round and having speedier decisions. Is that an opportunity that the member supports our taking?

Maurice Golden: It is an opportunity that we need to explore further. There are a number of nuances. For example, I can think of people with whom I played who played professionally for

perhaps only one game and then played amateur football for the rest of their time. There are legal issues, in particular, about who would be liable in such cases. We absolutely should look into that and see whether legal minds can work that through. To give an example, Dave Narey played for one club—Dundee United—for the vast majority of his career, until he moved to Raith Rovers. The link is far more compelling in that case.

Football is significant to the fabric of our nation and our national psyche, and the game's importance for those who play and love it cannot be overstated, but brain injury is a critical issue in sport that needs to be better understood.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Mark Griffin, who joins us remotely.

18:10

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): I am sorry that I cannot be with everyone in the chamber for the debate. I fully support Michael Marra's motion and welcome the opportunity to ensure that our footballers' trauma does not go unheard.

Establishing a working group is a vital step. There is no body in Scotland that could consider the evidence on brain injury and make recommendations to support and protect former and current players. As the motion says, we must get together the sport's governing bodies, consider the issues and urgently look at the growing body of research.

I am keen for us to agree that brain injury should be seen as an industrial disease. Through Social Security Scotland, we have major new powers that could be focused on providing support to those who are suffering now. As Michael Marra highlighted, Dr William Stewart's findings of 3.5 times more chance of dying from a neurodegenerative disease and of a fivefold increase in Alzheimer's disease among former footballers substantiate the growing link between being a former professional footballer and having a condition such as dementia.

When evidence emerges—we have heard about heartbreaking experiences, such as those of Denis Law and Billy McNeill—we should use the knowledge to act. Just yesterday, I lodged again my proposal for a Scottish employment injuries advisory council bill, which would establish an independent body to research, shape and scrutinise the benefits that are available to those who are injured through their work. No such body exists in Scotland. The funding for any such payments runs through the Scottish budget, but our powers over industrial injuries disablement benefit are in no practical sense being exploited,

and the Scottish Government is not thinking about the illnesses and diseases that are acquired in modern workplaces and are affecting workers now.

Michael Marra is right in saying that the evidence is clear. The balance-of-probabilities test—when the incidence of a disease in an occupation is twice the rate in another—has clearly been met, but the Scottish Government does not seem to be prepared to classify dementia among professional footballers as an industrial injury. The current scheme is becoming increasingly outdated and out of step with modern work, modern working patterns and the harms that workers encounter, and much more can be done to support people who are injured through their work.

In December, when I asked the First Minister about prescribing long Covid as an industrial disease, the Scottish Government deferred to waiting on the view of the United Kingdom advisory council, which said, “Not yet” to the UK Government. However, the Scottish Government should have asked a Scottish advisory council that had mandated trade union members, along with scientists and legal experts who could scrutinise the evidence and advise on changes to Scotland’s benefit system. No such council has been established.

Unions including the GMB, Unite the Union and the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers, organisations such as the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, and academics including Professor Andrew Watterson of the University of Stirling back the proposed bill. We should assemble the experts on a powerful statutory body that is independent of the Government and has the authority and tools to secure an employment injury system that is fit for purpose.

Like key workers in the NHS, social care workers, shop workers, bus drivers or train staff with long Covid, our footballers have developed their illness simply from doing their jobs. Securing changes to the new benefit for those who have unknowingly sacrificed their health for our entertainment would be a bold sign that we are willing to support all workers who are injured through their work. We have a generational chance to provide an industrial injuries benefits system that is fit for the 21st century and that reflects the modern harms that workers face. We should take it.

18:15

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank Michael Marra for bringing this important debate to the chamber.

The increased number of former professional footballers speaking publicly about their dementia diagnoses in recent years has undoubtedly encouraged increased research into the links between playing the sport professionally and being diagnosed with a neurodegenerative disease. The bravery of those former professionals in speaking out means that we can have this debate. Therefore, I encourage the Scottish Government to act purposefully to support professional footballers who are living with dementia and those who are currently playing the sport and might be worried about the impacts that it could have in later life.

Other members have quoted the statistics on the increased link, so I will not repeat them. However, the University of Glasgow found that, although the likelihood of being diagnosed with a disease such as dementia might vary depending on career length, it does not vary depending on the era during which a player played. That confirms that we have made little progress in making the game safer, which is an important point.

The diagnosis of those former footballers relates to an injury caused at work. That is the link. Football is a global, multibillion-pound industry in which a decent career can ensure financial stability for life. However, that was not always the case for footballers who played in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Their commitment to football often only just managed to pay the bills and put food on the table. It is important to note that many professional football players today are not paid the breathtaking figures that we read about in relation to high-profile players. They continue to play football, doing a job—just like the rest of us—that makes them much more susceptible to conditions such as dementia than the average person.

Wider discussion is needed in the football and health communities about reducing the incidence of dementia among professional footballers in the future. As I said, there is a clear link between playing professionally and dementia. It is an industrial injury.

It is in the Scottish Parliament’s power to right a historical wrong, lead the way and classify such incidences as cases of industrial injury. If we do so, players who are affected will be entitled to receive the industrial injury disablement benefit and have the fact that they were injured at work recognised by the state. That would be a small but important step, and it is supported by the Professional Footballers Association Scotland and the GMB. It would go towards helping former professionals who are affected and would be a great step for the future of current players who might be worried.

We can all agree that the personal stories of those former professionals and their families are devastating. Too many lives have already been lost and too many more people will suffer unduly if no action is taken. The Scottish Government has the power to act. In the interests of supporting and protecting our former, current and future professional players, I support Michael Marra's motion and hope that the Government will do more with purpose before it is too late for many players.

18:19

The Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport (Maree Todd): I thank Michael Marra for his motion and for raising an important issue. The debate has raised many questions, which highlights how complicated the issue is. The Scottish Government wants people to take part in sport and physical activity in a safe environment.

Concern around head injuries in sport has been growing for a number of years, so I want to mention the changes and practices that our sports governing bodies have implemented to protect their players of all ages and abilities. I am proud that Scotland produced the first concussion national guidance, which continues to be refreshed using the latest international research. Dr Niall Elliott and his team at the sportscotland institute for sport, along with the lead clinicians from our sporting governing bodies, came together to produce the guidelines, and they continue to review them.

However, it is not an issue of simply publishing guidance and leaving it there. Education is the best way of protecting those who participate in sport. Education for coaches, parents, medical staff and players is vital to ensure that, when someone receives a head knock, they get consistent advice on what to do and a pathway for getting the appropriate rest before considering going back to sport.

A United Kingdom parliamentary committee recently published a report on concussion that noted Scotland's approach in a positive light. One of its recommendations for the UK Government was to create a UK-wide set of guidelines, and officials in the active Scotland division have already begun discussions with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport on how our guidelines were created and how a joined-up approach might work to ensure that guidance can be amended to reflect changes in research.

Although that is a positive step forward, I am aware that a lot of the discussion tonight has focused on the care for players who have retired from playing sport and, in particular, football. As many members have mentioned, a growing number of former footballers have bravely come

forward to say that they have a diagnosis of dementia, and my thoughts go out to them and their families.

I commend those ex-players—including Denis Law, who recently came forward and who, as my Aberdonian colleague has reminded me, is still the only Scottish winner of the FIFA Ballon d'Or—for taking that public step, as it helps not only to increase awareness of how the progress of dementia impacts those affected and their families but to tackle stigma. The Scottish Government is committed to increasing our knowledge of the possible links between neurodegenerative disease, including dementia, and sports-related brain injury. We recognise the call to establish a working group on the issue and will respond to that in due course as part of our on-going consideration.

A University of Glasgow study published in 2019 on lifelong health outcomes in former professional footballers, especially in relation to dementia, contained evidence of a possible increased risk of dementia among professional ex-footballers. Further work is under way to establish why footballers and rugby players might be at greater risk. We will also give full consideration to the report of the study led by Dr Willie Stewart, which was published in August.

We remain in close contact on the issues with experts at the sportscotland institute of sport and with the chief medical officer at the Scottish FA, and we will work with all partners, including the Professional Footballers Association Scotland, to carefully consider emerging evidence on former footballers developing dementia.

I want to quickly mention the Scottish FA's guidance to all clubs and coaches on heading footballs, which makes it clear that heading is not permitted for the under-12s and is to be introduced only slowly as players get older. Again, the guidance is there to be followed and adapted, and I commend the Scottish FA and its partners for bringing in that change.

I am also aware that questions have been asked in the chamber about whether the Scottish Government has plans to classify dementia that is developed through sport as an industrial disease. Unfortunately, industrial injuries disablement benefit is currently delivered by the UK Government, and I understand that it does not currently consider dementia to be an industrial injury.

Michael Marra: Does that not provide an opportunity for the Scottish Government to show leadership in the area by putting in place its own process that would, as Mark Griffin highlighted, allow the decisions to be made in Scotland? The Scottish Government has promised a service from

Social Security Scotland that is different and that will give people dignity. Is this not an opportunity to do that and to put in place a better system that allows us, in Scotland, to come to conclusions on the basis of the evidence?

Maree Todd: The member is absolutely right to suggest that the service will be delivered by the Scottish Government in future, but it will be delivered after a full public consultation on how best to meet people's needs. I agree with Richard Leonard that it is a good thing that we are debating the issue in our Parliament. All the points that have been raised this evening and at many other times can be aired in the consultation, and all the complexities can be explored.

For the first time in Scotland, we are taking a specific national approach to dementia risk reduction and prevention in our public health and clinical services. Brain Health Scotland, which was established by the Scottish Government in 2020 with investment of £1 million over five years and which is hosted by Alzheimer Scotland, will publish in 2021 its first population-level dementia risk reduction and prevention strategy. We will also be piloting brain health services to identify and support pre-symptomatic patients who might show clinical indicators of brain decline and dementia risk and to provide personalised risk reduction and prevention plans.

Several groups might be at even greater risk of dementia than the background population, although I should point out that the background risk is high, with one in three of those over 80 affected. Those groups include people with a strong family history, those with a history of heart disease, diabetes and stroke and those who have had repetitive brain injury. From this latter group, research led by the University of Glasgow has recognised the increased risk of dementia in retired football players. The same is possibly true of rugby, too, but more research will be required on that. Research funded by the Alzheimer's Society and PFA Scotland and led from the University of Edinburgh—it involves the PREVENT dementia rugby and football cohort—is looking at identifying the underlying reasons why the link might exist.

That high-risk group can be seen in clinical services identical to those envisaged for the general population. In fact, I should point out that not only is it a high-risk group for dementia, but retired players in mid-life and older are becoming increasingly anxious about their brain health through awareness of, as other members have noted, the increasingly frequent high-profile cases of people being diagnosed with dementia.

The Scottish Government is fully behind making sport safer, especially when it comes to the prevention and treatment of head injuries. As the

minister responsible for sport, I regularly meet sportscotland and governing bodies to discuss a range of topics, including safeguarding.

I thank Michael Marra for bringing the debate to the Parliament, and I thank everyone who has contributed to tonight's discussion.

Meeting closed at 18:26.

This is the final edition of the *Official Report* for this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

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